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# Living History: Experiencing Great Events of the Ancient and Medieval Worlds

Course Guidebook

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Professor Garland was the recipient of the George Grote Prize in Ancient History in 1982. He was a Fulbright Scholar and fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington DC (1985–1986) and a visiting scholar at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton (1990). He has taught at the University of Reading, the University of London, Keele University, and the University of Maryland at College Park. He also was the Benjamin Meaker Visiting Professor at the University of Bristol (1995). In addition to his 28 years of teaching classics at Colgate University, Professor Garland has taught English and drama to secondary school students and lectured at universities throughout Britain and at the British School at Athens.

Professor Garland's research focuses on the social, religious, political, and cultural history of both Greece and Rome. He has written 12 books and many articles in both academic and popular journals. His books include *The Greek Way of Death* (which has been translated into Japanese); *The Piraeus: From the Fifth to the First Century B.C.*; *The Greek Way of Life: From Conception to Old Age*; *Introducing New Gods: The Politics of Athenian Religion*; *Religion and the Greeks* (which has been translated into Greek); *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World*; *Daily Life of the Ancient Greeks* (which has been translated into

Greek); *Surviving Greek Tragedy*; *Julius Caesar*; *Celebrity in Antiquity: From Media Tarts to Tabloid Queens*; *Hannibal* (which has been translated into German); and *Wandering Greeks: The Ancient Greek Diaspora from the Age of Homer to the Death of Alexander the Great*. His expertise has been featured in the History Channel's *The True Story of Troy*, and he often has served as a consultant for educational film companies.

Professor Garland's previous Great Courses are *Greece and Rome: An Integrated History of the Ancient Mediterranean* and *The Other Side of History: Daily Life in the Ancient World*. ■

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# Living History: Experiencing Great Events of the Ancient and Medieval Worlds

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## Scope:

In this course, we will experience a number of key events in the ancient world by concentrating our attention on historical moments when an individual has an illuminating revelation or where the tide of history changes dramatically. Sometimes, an occurrence in the space of a moment changes the world forever.

We will meet some remarkable women. We will be at the Battle of Actium, when Mark Antony takes flight for Egypt with his lover Cleopatra and then the two of them undertake a suicide pact. We will see a common concubine become empress of China, when China is one of the most traditional societies in the world. We will be in Constantinople when the Byzantine empress Theodora saves her husband Justinian from ending his life in ignominy.

We also will meet some extraordinary men. We will be among the jurors who will try and condemn Socrates to death. We will be with Alexander the Great when his men finally refuse to take another step forward into the unknown. We will wait apprehensively for the arrival of Hannibal outside the gates of Rome just after he has won a spectacular victory. We will be in Jerusalem for the trial of a seemingly insignificant prophet from Galilee. We will accompany the prophet Muhammad when he escapes his assassins by a hair's breadth and establishes a community of believers now accounting for 20 percent of the world's population.

This course identifies a particular type of history that is truly alive, because of the intensity and urgency of the events that it explores. This means experiencing history by entering into it imaginatively, engaging with the personas of its actors, and considering what it was like to be a particular person on a particular day facing a particular reality. This also means asking what it would have been like either to witness some earth-shattering event or to be a participant in that event.

The history that we will encounter will be alive, charged with poignancy, excitement, and intensity, and will be entered into empathetically. We will break down the events of the past into specific days, hours, and moments, so that we can hear the heartbeat of history. ■

# Ramesses II: Heartbeat of History

## Lecture 1

**W**e can experience the past by concentrating all of our attention on certain historical moments, when an individual has an illuminating revelation or when the tide of history changes dramatically. Sometimes, an occurrence in the space of a moment changes the world forever. This course makes two large claims: that the history we're going to encounter is indeed alive—charged with poignancy, excitement, and intensity—and that it can indeed be lived, or at least relived, and entered into empathetically.

### King Xerxes

- It's the spring of 480 B.C.E. The Persian Wars are being fought between the Greeks and the Persians, and East and West are about to set out on a fatal collision course that will permanently reshape the landscape of history.
- The Persian king Xerxes—the King of the Four Corners of the World, as he styles himself—has assembled a massive army and fleet and is seated on his throne at the southern shore of the Hellespont, the narrow strait between the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara that today we call the Dardanelles, in northwestern Turkey.
- Xerxes is reviewing his army as it is about to cross over from Asia into modern-day Europe to attack mainland Greece. Xerxes's engineers have constructed a pontoon bridge made of ships tied together and anchored parallel to the current. The king is flush with pride and ambition and dreams of imperial conquest.
- Xerxes is the ruler of the world's largest empire to date. It extends from Pakistan in the east to Macedonia in the west and from the Black Sea and Caucasus Mountains in the north to Egypt in the south. The Persian Empire of this time incorporates a multitude of different peoples, which makes it the world's first truly

multinational, polyglot empire. It covers about a million square miles. Scholars put the size of its population at anywhere from 25 million to 70 million.

- The Greek historian Herodotus tells us that Xerxes has an army of 2.5 million and a fleet of 1,207 triremes, or warships powered by three banks of rowers with a top speed of about nine knots and capable of executing a 180-degree turn in just one minute. Regardless of the accuracy of the numbers, Xerxes's army is so large that Xerxes can't see the waters of the Hellespont, because there are so many ships bobbing on its surface.
- All the land around, about as far as the eye can see, is dense with soldiers, as well. Their weapons and armor glitter in the sunlight. Xerxes thinks himself blessed, according to Herodotus. It's almost a spiritual feeling he's experiencing; he's thinking that he's the luckiest man alive. Then, a second later, Xerxes bursts into a flood of tears.
- Xerxes's uncle Artabanos, who happens to be his military advisor and who is standing right beside him, says: "What a difference there is between your mood now and your mood of a moment ago. Then you counted yourself blessed and now you are weeping." The great king responds: "I was suddenly overcome by pity at the brevity of human life. I was reflecting that not one of these men will be alive in 100 years' time."
- This anecdote gives us access to a precisely defined moment in history, even if Herodotus is giving free rein to his imagination. Herodotus is a historian of great insight. The anecdote he has chosen enables us to hear the heartbeat of history. The private memoir puts us inside Xerxes's head, with the result that the 2,500 years that separate him from us suddenly evaporate.
- One moment Xerxes is up—he's on the top of the world, dreaming of world dominion—and the next he's down; he's struck with a sense of his own, and everyone else's, mortality. When he says that "not one of these men will be alive," he's including himself. And

he is right. And that is what it means to be human: to be able to identify with other people.

- The moment at the Hellespont is a turning point. After Xerxes has mastered his emotions, he and Artabanos have a lengthy discussion, during which Artabanos confesses to his nephew, the king, that he has serious doubts about the wisdom of invading Greece. Artabanos points out that there aren't enough harbors where the Persian fleet can shelter and that it's going to be immensely difficult to feed such a large army.
- Xerxes listens patiently. He respects his uncle. But in the end, he chooses to ignore these concerns. In reporting this, Herodotus is saying that it is just possible that the expedition might have been called off—even at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour.
- But it isn't called off. Instead, Xerxes crosses the Hellespont. He will invade Greece and cause unimaginable slaughter, both to the Greeks and to his own people. And it could all have been avoided. That sometimes happens in history—a moment can determine all. History turns on a dime.
- For reasons that are sometimes beyond our imagining, things can change forever in one solitary instant. Often, we cannot know precisely when, or what, will change the course of our lives, or change the course of history. Sometimes, it is the result of what might seem to be haphazard and accidental—what philosophers often call contingency. Sometimes, the direction that history takes is the result of factors that are more deep-seated and that have been building up over time. History—like life itself—is ruled in part by contingency.

## **Ramesses II**

- In the year 1285 B.C.E., Egypt is the most prosperous and perhaps the most advanced society in the world. It's between June and September, and the River Nile is in full flood. Egypt, Herodotus memorably remarks, is the gift of the Nile.

- Ramesses II is the pharaoh. He's off fighting "the abominable Kheta"—the Hittites, a people the Egyptians loathe. Their empire lies to the north of Egypt, in modern-day Turkey. They are a highly developed society, and like the Egyptians, they are literate. We have thousands of clay tablets with writing in the cuneiform script from their archives. The Egyptians and the Hittites are the two superpowers of the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. And like all superpowers, they have been encroaching on each other's spheres of interest.
- Ramesses is just about to engage the Hittite king Muwatalli in battle outside a town called Kadesh—in modern-day Syria—a few miles south of the city of Homs. There have been many minor skirmishes between the Egyptians and the Hittites in recent years. But Ramesses has decided to go on the offensive and confront the enemy in all-out combat. He's young, and he wants a great victory to boost his image.
- The Egyptian army sets out from a town called Piramesse, the pharaoh's new capital, in the eastern delta of the River Nile. It passes through modern-day Israel, crossing the Beqaa Valley in what today is east Lebanon, and finally arrives at Kadesh, on the Orontes River in Syria. Kadesh marks the dividing line between Hittite and Egyptian imperialist ambitions.
- Ramesses has marched 300 miles. When he arrives, there's a surprise in store for him. His rival, the Hittite king Muwatalli, is already waiting for him. Ramesses isn't expecting to have to face Muwatalli at Kadesh. His spies have told him that the enemy was in the far north, in Aleppo, in northern Syria—too scared to confront him in battle. Instead, here he is. Ramesses is taken completely off guard because he finds himself confronted by a huge army.
- Ramesses has been advancing so hastily that three of his four divisions are way behind. Muwatalli, instead of attacking the pharaoh directly, unleashes his army on the trailing second division before it can catch up with Ramesses and cuts it to pieces. He



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**Ramesses II reigned as pharaoh in the last peak of Egypt's imperial power.**

then turns his forces on the first division. Ramesses is completely surrounded by 2,500 chariots (or, so he later claims, when he authorizes inscriptions describing his victory to be carved).

- Even Ramesses's closest companions are about to abandon him, he would say. And then, Ramesses calls upon his father, who isn't a mortal but the god Amun—the patron god of the pharaohs, traditionally depicted in the form of a ram or a human with a ram's head—to come to his rescue. His father hears his prayer and addresses his son as follows:

Go forward, I, your father, am with you, my hand is with you, I shall prevail over a hundred thousand, I am he who masters victory, I am he who loves valor.

- When Ramesses hears these words, we're told, he's imbued with superhuman strength and proceeds to wreak havoc on the enemy. We, not being ancient Egyptians, might suspect that it is perhaps the arrival of Ramesses's auxiliary forces in the nick of time that rescues him and his men, by striking the Hittites from the rear. Even so, we should not underestimate the power of faith to move mountains when faced with overwhelming odds.
- This is a moment when the tables are turned just in time to avoid a total disaster. As a result, Ramesses is able to make a tactical withdrawal. And if the tables weren't turned at this precise moment, it's possible that Ramesses would have suffered a catastrophic defeat—his army would have been massacred, the Hittites would have invaded Egypt, and Egypt would have been brought to its knees, ushering in centuries of foreign domination. Instead, Egypt will remain a powerful, secure, and independent state for about 400 years, until succumbing to foreign aggression.
- Once home, Ramesses is able to paint his campaign as a glorious victory. Although it is true that he has pulled off a remarkable recovery and that he is personally valorous, it isn't the case that he won a glorious victory. The Egyptian army only just managed



to make that tactical retreat; its losses were very heavy. They may well have been as heavy as the losses inflicted on the Hittites. As a result, Ramesses now lacks the manpower to make a further assault or to conduct a siege of the city of Kadesh.

- The truth of the matter is that the fight has ended in a stalemate. Yet the Battle of Kadesh is destined to become one of the most famous campaigns ever waged in the ancient world. Ramesses and his spin doctors will see to that.
- Ramesses II is probably the most famous of all the pharaohs, and he is also arguably the greatest. His reign will last for 67 years. He erects monuments of himself throughout Egypt, and many tell the story of the Battle of Kadesh. It's recounted at Abydos, at Abu Simbel, three times at Karnak, and twice at Luxor. Several Egyptian papyri also record the battle.
- We also have a Hittite version, in the form of an inscription at the Hittite capital at Boghazköy. That discovery has enabled scholars to make a more balanced assessment. But the Egyptians couldn't read Hittite, and it's likely that they would not have trusted anything that the "abominable Kheta" had written, even if they could.

### Suggested Reading

Gabriel and Boose, "Kadesh."

Healy, *Qadesh 1300 BC*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What events in world history would you most like to be able to observe in close detail?
2. What significant events in recent times have taken place as the result of contingency?

# Marathon: The Persians Have Landed!

## Lecture 2

It's hardly an exaggeration to state that September 11, 490 B.C.E., changed the course of history. Had the Athenians lost the Battle of Marathon, they would themselves, in a manner of speaking, have been history. It's certainly true that the great accomplishments of the classical era would not have taken place as we know them. We wouldn't have the Parthenon, nor would we have Greek tragedy, philosophy, historiography, or science.

### The Persians versus the Athenians

- It is the morning of September 11 in the year 490 B.C.E., and a large Persian invasion force has just landed in the Bay of Marathon, on the east coast of modern-day Greece. In nearby Athens, the Greek military is under the command of a board of 10 elected generals called *stratêgoi*, presided over by a senior magistrate called the *polemarchos*. The generals are debating whether to stay put and protect Athens against a Persian onslaught or to march north into the Attic Peninsula and face the Persians head-on at Marathon.
- Marathon is 26 miles from Athens. Although most of the Greek deliberating body urges maintaining the defense of Athens—and awaiting the arrival of the Persians—one man, Miltiades, is adamant that they should march to Marathon. It is his view that carries the day. So, the Athenian army will march from Athens to do battle with the Persians.
- This defending army is small when compared with the invading Persian force. But the Athenians also send a runner to Sparta to request help. The Spartans have the most powerful army in Greece. They train endlessly and are disciplined fighters. If anyone can help the Athenians see the Persians off, it is them.
- The stakes are very high. The Athenians know that if the Persians defeat them in battle, their city-state will be destroyed. That is the

fate the Persians have already meted out to Eretria, a small city-state on the southern shores of the island of Euboea, just off the Attic coast. However, Sparta is about 150 miles from Athens, and even if the Spartans send an army to assist, several days will pass before it arrives.

- Greek cities lie as far west as Spain and as far north as the shores of the Black Sea. However, the Persians rule the largest empire the world has ever seen. It extends from Pakistan in the east to Turkey in the west and to Egypt in the south.
- At the head of the Persian empire is the Great King (or “King of Kings”). He has the power of life and death over his subjects; in other words, he’s an autocrat. The Athenians, by comparison, belong to what we call a polis, which consists of an urban center surrounded by countryside. About 1,000 such Greek city-states dot mainland Greece and ring the shores of the Mediterranean. Every citizen has the right to vote in the Assembly and to serve in the military.
- Our principal source for the Battle of Marathon is the historian Herodotus, often referred to as “the father of history,” a title that Cicero first accorded him.

### **Philippides’s Journey and Vision**

- The Athenians have known for some time that the Persians were going to attack them. The Persians are seeking revenge for the fact that Athens aided the Ionian Greeks in their doomed uprising against Persia a few years earlier.
- The Ionians are Greeks who live on the west coast of Anatolia, in modern-day Turkey. When the Ionians revolted, they sent heralds around Greece requesting aid. But only the Athenians and the Eretrians delivered. The Ionian Revolt—which broke out in 499—was finally crushed mercilessly by the Persians in 494. And now it is time for the Persians to teach the Greeks a lesson, in turn.

- It is the Persian king Darius who dispatches an expedition to punish those who had the temerity to meddle in his affairs. The Persian fleet sets out from Ionia, lands on the island of Rhodes, and besieges the city of Lindos. Next, it heads north to the island of Samos, crosses the Aegean, and lands on Naxos, burning down temples and enslaving some of the population.
- After stopping at the island of Delos, the Persians head to Eretria. After about six days, the Persians take Eretria. Women and children are enslaved, men are killed, and temples are burned.
- At last leaving a smoldering ruin behind, the Persians sail the short distance south across the strip of water that separates Euboea from the Greek mainland toward Attica. An Athenian exile named Hippias, who formerly ruled the city-state as a tyrant, is accompanying the Persians, hoping to be reinstated in the event of a Persian victory. He suggests that the Persians land in the Bay of Marathon, because it is an ideal place for their cavalry to operate. However, the Persian cavalry doesn't end up playing any part in the battle.
- Philippides—the runner whom the Athenians dispatched to Sparta—now has an important part to play in the story. While Sparta is about 150 miles from Athens, Philippides accomplishes the run within hours. Herodotus tells us that Philippides arrives the very next day. This means that the Athenians could probably now expect an answer from Sparta within two to three days. They are on tenterhooks as they face down the Persian army camped opposite them, neither side stirring.
- When Philippides arrives back at Marathon after delivering his request, he tells the Athenian generals that the Spartans—although sympathetic to their dilemma—are in the midst of a festival held in honor of the god Apollo Karneios called the Karneia, so they can't leave Sparta and come to their rescue until it's over, five days later.



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**The Persian king Darius, who reigned from 522 to 486 B.C.E., never successfully conquered Greece but tried several times.**

- Philippides also declares that the god Pan is going to be fighting on the side of the Athenians. He explains that on his way back—when he was crossing Mount Parthenion, above the town of Tegea—the goat-footed god appeared to him and even addressed him by name. The Athenians believe Philippides's account, and more importantly, the hope of having Pan on their side may end up making all the difference.

### **The Battle of Marathon**

- The size of the Persian army is probably around 20,000 to 25,000 men, meaning that the Athenians are outnumbered by a factor of about two to one. The only non-Athenians fighting alongside them are the Plataeans.
- Plataea is a small city-state situated to the north of Athens in a region called Boeotia. It has been allied to Athens for about 30 years, because it doesn't want to come under the control of the Thebans, who dominate the region. The Plataeans have contributed 1,000 men to the Athenian forces, and that is a highly significant contribution that the Athenians will never forget.
- The Athenians have encamped in the plain of Marathon in a sanctuary of Heracles—the Greek version of the Roman Hercules—a short distance from shore. Before the battle takes place, Datis, the Persian commander, first requests that the Athenians submit to Persian rule. If they do, he will treat them leniently. If they don't, he will do what he did to the Eretrians: burn their city to the ground.
- The board of 10 generals votes on whether to accept Datis's offer. Five generals want to surrender to Datis; five reject the offer. Miltiades—the Athenian who urged the Greeks to march to Marathon—then delivers a rousing speech. He addresses a man named Callimachus, who is the polemarch and has the deciding vote.
- After Miltiades's speech, Callimachus decides to side with Miltiades and votes to reject the Persian offer. All the Athenian generals are now committed to do battle. According to Herodotus, it

is the Athenian practice that the command of the army passes from one general to another each day, and each general now defers to the valiant Miltiades.

- Unaccountably, Miltiades himself chooses to wait to do battle. The two armies probably stare at each other for about five days. Eventually, however, the battle lines are drawn up adjacent to the shore. We don't know what finally persuades the two sides to engage, but eventually, the two sides take their stand about 1,500 meters apart, and battle is about to be joined.
- Just beforehand, the Athenians perform a sacrifice to determine whether the omens are favorable. It turns out that the omens are favorable. The two sides now approach each other. When the Athenians get to within 200 meters of the Persian enemy, they do something unexpected: They charge at a run. This is a tactic commonly performed by Greek armies but quite possibly unknown to the Persians. And it takes them completely by surprise.
- Herodotus tells us that the immediate Persian reaction is that the Athenians are mad. The Athenians—greatly outnumbered, lacking any support from any cavalry and having no archers—are tearing across the battlefield, screaming their heads off.
- Pan, the god of panic, is fighting on the Athenian side. And the Persians panic. The Athenians' charge doesn't end the battle; the Persians go on fighting, and the battle rages for several hours. But taking the initiative probably gives the Athenians the edge.
- Eventually, the Athenians and the Plataeans break through the Persian flanks, driving the enemy into the marshes close to the shore, where they have difficulty defending themselves. Then, the center of the army gives way, whereupon the Persians flee to their ships, hotly pursued by the Greeks.
- Once the remnant of the Persian army has boarded its ships, the Persian commander Datis decides to make for Athens and seize the

city while it is unguarded. The Persian fleet sails around the Attic Peninsula to its southern tip and then heads toward Phaleron Bay, where it intends to beach. It will take the Persians at least 10 hours to reach Phaleron across the water, although it's possible that some ships have detached themselves previously and are already in the vicinity, awaiting the arrival of the main fleet.

- Miltiades now tells his exhausted compatriots that they can't bask in the fruits of victory but have to quickly march back to Athens to defend it against Persian attack and fight another battle the next day. This is precisely what they do—leaving all the wounded and dead, amounting to several hundreds, if not thousands.
- This is surely one of the most strenuous marches that any army ever undertook. It probably takes the Athenians about eight hours to make the march by land, which is faster than the Persian fleet will arrive, because the Greeks are taking a more direct route.
- Upon arrival, tired but exhilarated, they encamp outside the city and are drawn up in battle formation before dawn the next morning. When the Persians arrive and realize that Athens is defended, they decide to sail away.
- After their victory, the Athenians introduce a cult of Pan into Athens and give the goat-god a cave on the north side of the Acropolis.
- The casualties are said to number 6,400 Persian dead and 192 Athenians. These figures likely are accurate, because after the Persians abandoned the battlefield, the Athenians, out of pride, will have made an exact count of the fallen.
- The 192 Athenians who have died fighting the Persians are regarded as heroes in a religious sense. A hero is someone who has powers above those of an ordinary human, who is worshiped after his death, and who is invoked in times of need. For this reason, the state buries the Marathonian dead in a communal grave known as



the *soros* and heaps a mound on top of them. This is an exceptional honor. That burial mound is still visible to this day and is a very sacred spot.

### Suggested Reading

Billows, *Marathon*.

Secunda, *Marathon 490 BC*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What advantages and disadvantages did the Athenians face at the Battle of Marathon by being a democracy?
2. To what extent was the outcome of the Battle of Marathon the result of contingency?

# ***Oresteia*: Judgment at the Dionysia**

## **Lecture 3**

**T**oday, Greek tragedy is one of the most popular ways by which a mass of people encounters the ancient Greek world. The *Oresteia*, a trilogy written by the Greek playwright Aeschylus, is one of the most innovative and revolutionary dramas ever performed. It's a miracle that the *Oresteia* has survived—in fact, it's a miracle that any Greek play survived the live-performance medium across 25 centuries—but it has survived, and it can teach us a lot about ancient Athenian life.

### **Athenian Drama and Democracy**

- The year is 458 B.C.E. We're sitting in the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, on the south slope of the Acropolis. It's an open-air auditorium, and there's a spectacular view looking in the direction of the Gulf of Corinth and the Peloponnesian peninsula. It's late March, and we're attending a festival known as the City Dionysia, sponsored by Athens in honor of Dionysus, the god who can enable people to achieve ecstasy.
- Four solid days of attending the theater stretch ahead of us, three devoted to tragedy and one to comedy. We're here today to watch tragedy—a trilogy of tragedies, in fact—followed by a kind of farce, in which satyrs (wild men with bestial features who lust after nymphs) get up to all sorts of mischief. Three different playwrights will have their works performed on three successive days. They are in fierce competition with one another. At the conclusion of these performances, a jury will vote, and one of the dramatist's offerings will be awarded the festival's highly prestigious first prize.
- Drama is a big deal in Athens. Plutarch—a Greek historian who will be born more than half a millennium later—tells us that the Athenians spend more money on dramatic productions than they do on fighting the Persians or acquiring their empire. It's been estimated that about 1,500 individuals participated in staging the

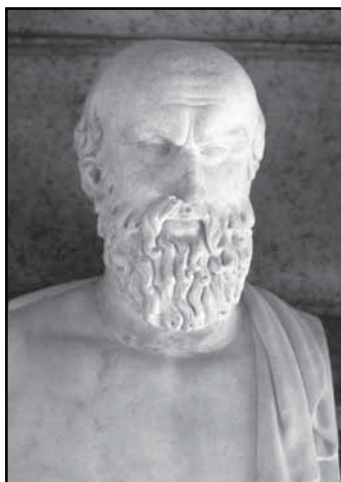
plays performed at the City Dionysia each year. So, there's a great deal at stake, not only for the playwrights but also for everyone involved in each of the three productions.

- Athens completed a democratic revolution four years ago. Up until then, a great deal of power resided in an aristocratic council known as the Areopagus. At one time, judicial authority was vested in the Areopagus, and that enabled it to exercise considerable political influence, as well. In 462 or 461, however, it was stripped of this power, except for jurisdiction in murder trials.
- This was a radical step, and many people are still uneasy about the transition. And that's one issue that Aeschylus, the aspiring playwright, addresses in the *Oresteia* trilogy—whether it was right to strip the Areopagus of its powers.
- Athenian democracy is a unique experiment. The world has never known anything like it before and probably will never see anything like it again. Athenian democracy is not representative democracy, as we know it in the West today. Instead, it is participatory, or direct, democracy. Athenian democracy is based on the right of every citizen to address and vote in the Assembly and on the right of every citizen to serve as a juror in the courts of law.

### **The *Oresteia* by Aeschylus**

- The *Oresteia* by Aeschylus is the only surviving trilogy in the canon of 32 Greek tragedies that has come to us. The central character is Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, the Greek commander in the Trojan War who is married to Clytemnestra.
- Even though the story of *Oresteia* is set in the dim and distant past, at the time of the Trojan War, it's a reflection on a very recent chapter in Athenian history, and it's going to say something very important about democracy: It's going to explain how trial by jury came to be instituted.

- When the *Oresteia* begins, the Trojan War has been going on for 10 years. But before the war commenced, Agamemnon—the commander in chief of Greek forces—sacrificed his virgin daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis to secure a favorable wind to carry his fleet to Troy.
- In Agamemnon's absence, his wife, Clytemnestra, has been plotting revenge for this terrible deed. She's also taken a lover named Aegisthus, who also wants Agamemnon dead. Agamemnon's father, Atreus, served up Aegisthus's half brothers in a casserole that he then presented to the boys' father, Thyestes, concealing the hands and heads.
- At the instant the first play in the trilogy—known as the *Agamemnon*—begins, Troy falls and Agamemnon is on his way home. He's accompanied by a captive woman named Cassandra, who can see into the future.
- In her welcome home speech, Clytemnestra goes on and on about how glad she is to have her husband back, to which Agamemnon replies curtly, "Your speech, like my absence, was too long." Clytemnestra then urges him to step onto a purple tapestry, which she rolls out and which leads into the palace. Agamemnon is reluctant to do so; he's fearful that the gods will punish him for hubris, or excessive pride. Eventually, however, he yields, steps on the carpet, and enters the palace.
- Cassandra is led into the palace shortly afterward, but not before she has a vision about what is going to happen—her murder and



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**The Ancient Greek tragedian Aeschylus presented his *Oresteia* trilogy in 458 B.C.E.**

Agamemnon's—as well as revelations about other murders that have taken place in the house, including the infants who were served up in a casserole for their father to eat.

- Meanwhile, the Chorus of Elders—who have been on stage witnessing the action all along—can do nothing. They're old and physically decrepit. They were old before the war began. That's why they stayed at home. But they know a lot. And they have little respect for Clytemnestra. All they can do is mutter in their anxiety and rancor. So, the tension builds.
- Finally, we hear Agamemnon scream out in pain from inside the palace. It's an unexpected blood-curdling scream. Then, a few moments later, the doors of the palace open to reveal a tableau of the murdered Agamemnon and Cassandra.
- Clytemnestra comes forth and gloats over her crime. She describes how she dropped a net over Agamemnon while he was in the bath and then stabbed him the way a fisherman stabs fish—not once but twice. It was a cool and calculated deed. Then, shortly afterward, her lover Aegisthus trots out and gloats. He's barely on stage for more than a minute, which emphasizes that Clytemnestra is the real killer. This marks the end of the first play.
- Now Orestes is faced with a terrible dilemma. It's a son's sacred duty to avenge his father's death; he must avenge his father, but he has to do it by killing his mother. It's a typically Aeschylean dilemma. There's no good outcome. Evil is competing with evil, and good is competing with good.
- In the second play, known as the *Libation Bearers*, Orestes—who is now grown up—returns from abroad to find his sister Electra pouring libations at the tomb of Agamemnon. It was believed that the dead benefited in some way from drink offerings.
- The play takes its name from the female Trojan prisoners who are performing this task at the request of Clytemnestra. She has had

a bad dream and is seeking to appease the spirit of her murdered husband. Together, brother and sister now plot the murder of their mother and her lover. Just like at the end of the first play, the doors of the palace open to reveal two dead bodies.

- This is where Aeschylus takes the plot in a new direction. Up to now, the story would be entirely familiar to the audience. But as soon as Orestes kills his mother, he starts to lose his mind. He sees monstrous creatures called the Furies, who are pursuing him because of his crimes. And that's how the second play ends, with Orestes rushing offstage, demented.
- The third play, which will take us into near-contemporary times, is called the *Eumenides*, which means the Kindly Ones. The Kindly Ones are really the Furies. They're in pursuit of Orestes because of his terrible crime, and they become Kindly Ones only at the very end of the play.
- At the beginning of this third play, the Furies have pursued Orestes to Delphi, where Orestes is seeking to purify himself of his bloodguilt with the help of Apollo. We see the Furies—they are the chorus—and they are truly repulsive. After the purification ritual, Orestes goes to Athens as a suppliant, to seek the protection of Athena.
- The Furies pursue him again, and once they arrive, Athena institutes a court on the Areopagus to determine whether Orestes is guilty or innocent. This is the first trial that ever took place that is being enacted on stage.
- After Apollo speaks on behalf of the defense and the Furies for the prosecution, the Athenian jury, probably 12 men, vote—just as Athenian juries voted in the law courts each day and just as the three playwrights are about to be evaluated to determine which is worthy of the first prize.
- The verdict in the trial of Orestes turns out to be a tie. At this point, Athena steps in and casts the deciding vote. She votes to

acquit Orestes, not because she is convinced of his innocence, but because, as she says, she is Zeus's daughter and favors the male. So, Orestes is acquitted on a technicality—and that is what justice often is. Aeschylus is not making any special claims for trial by jury. He's noting that it's a human and fallible institution. But it's the best we have.

### The Judgment of the Trilogy

- The *Oresteia* trilogy is deeply personal to Athenians. It's a statement about what is unique about this Greek city-state: the first trial ever to take place in a court, which the goddess Athena established on the Areopagus. Now the three productions are to be judged. Athenians, like all Greeks, are intensely competitive.
- There are 10 judges, or *kritai*, which means "critic." They have no particular expertise in the theater. It is enough that they are citizens, in accordance with the principle called *isonomia*, meaning "equality under the law." Everybody has an equal opportunity. The 10 critics are selected by lot. As far as we know, they aren't required to account for their judgment. They just vote. On the whole, it's unlikely that they confer with one another, because Athenian juries judging criminal trials did not.
- The *kritai* bear a very heavy responsibility. They are fully aware that the reputations of the playwrights, actors, and producers are wholly in their hands. And as the audience watches the plays, they have the added thrill of knowing that a great deal is at stake for everyone involved, including the rich Athenians who paid for the productions. This is the way they pay their supertax.
- Finally, the 10 judges place their ballots in an urn. As the voting is secret, the audience doesn't know how each of them votes. Following this, an *archon*, or elected magistrate, draws out 5 of the 10 ballots. The purpose in drawing out only 5 is the same principle as that behind selecting the *kritai* by lot: The belief is that a part of the decision is left to the gods.

- The winner in the year 458 B.C.E. is the *Oresteia*. Technically, it isn't the playwright who receives the prize. Instead, it is the *chorêgos*, the wealthy Athenian who has paid all expenses of the production, including food and drink for the chorus, the masks and costumes, and so on. And all he receives, as far as we know, is an olive wreath—paltry perhaps, but highly charged with symbolic value.
- As for the playwright, it's very likely that he gets nothing. But what he attains, too, cannot be measured in material terms—namely, prestige. Nothing in the Greek world is more important than prestige, or glory.
- This is a face-to-face society in which everybody knows everybody. So, if you are the victorious *chorêgos*, playwright, or cast, you will bask in the renown of your triumph. Besides, there are ways in which you can materially self-promote. We know that it was common practice for the *chorêgos* to erect a monument in his own honor in a public place.

### Suggested Reading

Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*.

Garland, *Surviving Greek Tragedy*.

Goldhill, *The Oresteia*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What would have struck you, as an Athenian, as the most innovative thing about Aeschylus' *Oresteia*?
2. How would attending a performance in the Theater of Dionysus most dramatically differ from attending a modern theater production?



# Attack on Attica: Pericles's Gamble

## Lecture 4

Nothing was ever certain in the ancient world. In 431 B.C.E., Athens was at the height of its power and prosperity. But that was about to end with the Peloponnesian War. And that's what would make this powerful and prosperous moment so poignant. Athens would survive the plague and 10 years of war and would be able, in 421, to make peace with the Spartans on terms that were quite favorable. But Athens would never be the same again.

### The Acropolis and the Parthenon

- The year is 431 B.C.E., and Athens heads a maritime confederacy that is a source of enormous enrichment, because its allies are taxed in return for protection against the Persians. The confederacy was formed in 478 after the Greeks succeeded in driving Xerxes's invasion force out of Greece. Its purpose was to prevent any similar event from taking place again.
- However, in 431, the Persians are no longer anywhere to be found. The Athenians have seen them off long ago. And still the "allies"—nearly 200 of them—are paying an annual tribute, which is swelling Athens's coffers.
- Because Persia is no longer a threat to the Greeks, some of the tribute can now be poured into one of the most ambitious building projects the world has ever seen: the refurbishment of the Acropolis, whose temples were burned down by the Persians in 480.
- The centerpiece of the project is the Parthenon—the great temple of Athena Parthenos, Athena the Maiden—dominating the Acropolis, one of the most aesthetically refined buildings ever constructed. Not a single line is straight. Its fluted columns and architrave glisten in the sunshine. On the frieze that runs outside the temple, the

horses' bridles and other details are made of the finest gold. Inside the temple resides the monumental statue of the goddess Athena, carved by Phidias, the greatest sculptor of his day.

- The Parthenon is a powerful visual statement about what Athens has achieved. The new buildings close by are almost complete, but not quite. In fact, they never will be fully finished. These unfulfilled ambitions signify the moment when history—seemingly overnight—takes an entirely new direction.

### Pericles's Speech

- The Greek world in 431 is divided into two opposing camps. Virtually no state is outside the orbit of one or the other of two opposing powers. Sparta is the leader of the Peloponnesian League, an offensive and defensive alliance, and Athens is the head of a maritime empire.
- The Peloponnese is the southern peninsula of Greece. Athens and Sparta have been at loggerheads for decades. They signed a Thirty Years' Peace treaty in 448, but it is apparent that a showdown is inevitable and could occur at any moment. Any minor conflict could ignite a full-scale war. And it does.
- Thucydides, author of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* and our only source for this moment, identifies two main events that lead inextricably to war. Neither event directly involves either Athens or Sparta, but they both involve their allies, and that's how the war begins.
- In Athens in the spring of 431, on the eve of war, Pericles, the leading politician of the day, addresses the Athenian people in the Assembly and lays out his strategy. He starts by acknowledging that the Spartans and their Peloponnesian allies are unbeatable on land. And with the vast Athenian navy, and all the tribute that the allies bring them, the Athenians are unbeatable at sea.

- Pericles predicts that the war will end in a stalemate. And if it does, that means that the Athenians won, because they will have proven to the Spartans and their allies that they can't be contained or controlled by anyone.
- However, because the Peloponnesians are unbeatable on land, the Athenians are going to let them have free rein in Attica, the territory surrounding Athens. This means that all who live in the countryside are going to have to evacuate and move to the city. He says that within a year or two, the Spartans will have given up and will leave the Athenians alone.
- A proposal to evacuate is put forward, and the Assembly votes. As a participatory democracy, every one of Athens's citizens—about 30,000 at least—have the right to vote. In practice, however, the Assembly is dominated by those who live inside of Athens and thereabouts. So, it is probably mainly the town dwellers who vote on the proposal that the country dwellers should uproot themselves. The motion passes.



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**The Athenian statesman Pericles was principally responsible for making Athens the political and cultural center of Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.**

- Once the decision to vacate the countryside is made, the disruption in people's lives is enormous. Because more than half the total number of Athenians live in the countryside at the time the Peloponnesian War breaks out, the population of the city virtually doubles overnight.
- And how wrong Pericles will prove to be, in envisaging that the war will be over in a few months and in forecasting that the refugees will be able to return to their homes permanently at the end of the first year's fighting season. Instead, the refugees will decamp to Athens year after year—six times at least—at the beginning of the annual fighting season and be cooped up during the summer months in the most unsanitary conditions imaginable.
- Most of the evacuees have to travel by foot, though some ride on donkeys or perhaps in carts, and a handful of wealthy people have horses. Pregnant women, small children, and the elderly move at a snail's pace. Although the majority of slaves accompany their masters and mistresses to the city, a number of them take this opportunity to escape. Later in the war, the Peloponnesians will occupy a fortified base inside Attica, at a place called Decelea, and encourage Athenian slaves to desert there. About 20,000 slaves will take advantage of the opportunity.
- City dwellers are under intense pressure to open their doors to the evacuees. The citizen body is divided into 10 tribes, and it's likely that a tribesman who has fought previously alongside a member of the same tribe will offer accommodation to a comrade and his family. As part of a face-to-face society, many Athenians have direct, personal connections with one another. So, it's likely that there is a welcoming spirit of camaraderie that considerably eases the discomfort of the refugees, though it may not last very long.
- At first, all evacuees are crammed inside the city. As the pressure on space increases, however, they are permitted to settle along the unoccupied strips within the outlying Long Walls—the walls that join Athens to the Piraeus, the port town situated about four or five

miles to the southwest. The Long Walls run parallel to one another about 200 yards apart, so they can provide accommodation for several thousand refugees.

- The Piraeus, too, which is also fortified, will become densely occupied. It is this dense concentration of evacuees that will be responsible for the outbreak of a deadly plague, because the port city is largely dependent for drinking water on cisterns that catch rainwater. These cisterns quickly become polluted due to the huge population increase.

### **The Funeral Speech and the Plague**

- The urban mass, islanded within the encircling walls, now becomes the ancient equivalent of a modern-day refugee camp. Perhaps the Athenians derive some small crumb of comfort from an inspirational speech that Pericles gives in late September—or perhaps early October, when the evacuees have returned to their farms for the winter—over those who have fallen in the first year of the war.
- This is what we call the Funeral Speech. In it, Pericles sings the praises of Athens as a daring political experiment, the world's first and only radical democracy; as a cultural mecca; and as an economic powerhouse. It's one of the most thrilling speeches ever written. Pericles is chosen to give this speech because of his reputation. He is immensely powerful at this point, and the Athenian people have total faith in him.
- The next year, however, when the evacuees return, Athens is afflicted with a terrible plague. Plagues are breaking out all the time in the ancient world. But its occurrence on this occasion is more deadly, and more devastating, than most. One moment, Athens is being lauded to the skies by its greatest orator; the next moment, it is in the throes of a debilitating sickness that will reduce its population by a quarter or perhaps even a third. It will take it the better part of a generation to recover.

- Thucydides places his description of the pandemic immediately after Pericles's speech. It seems he does this because he wants us to see the contrast between Athens's claims to greatness and the terrible reality that is waiting just around the corner, though in fact these two things happened in quick succession. And once the plague hits Athens, nothing will ever be the same again. Pericles could not have made the same speech the next year. It would have rung hollow in everyone's ears.
- And now, among Athenian citizens, the plague is producing boils, ulcerations, burning sensations all over the body, discharges of bile, violent spasms, and unquenchable thirst, according to Thucydides's account. The Athenians suspect that the Peloponnesians have poisoned their wells. But in all probability, the plague is simply the direct result of the overcrowding of Athens. Athens's waste-disposal system is nowhere near adequate in dealing with the huge influx of people and animals. Its water supply quickly becomes contaminated, particularly in the Piraeus, which is wholly dependent on reservoirs.
- The plague takes a huge toll on family life, even though some people show immense compassion to their relatives and are unsparing in their efforts to tend their sick. Others, however, abandon all sense of responsibility and simply devote themselves to their own survival.
- And the Athenians aren't dealing just with the plague: They are also dealing with the fact that Sparta and its allies—about 30,000 enemy warriors in all—are devastating the countryside. Inevitably, disaffection runs high among some segments of the population.
- Pericles delivers his Funeral Speech in the fall of 431. The plague first attacks Athens in the summer of 430. The Athenians become so demoralized that they send envoys to Sparta seeking peace. The Spartans reject them.

- By now, the Athenians are losing faith in Pericles. So, probably in the late summer of the same year, Pericles stands up in the Assembly to defend himself and his policy. As usual, he's not in the least bit interested in currying favor. In fact, he's quite belligerent. "I'm the same man," he says. "I don't alter. It's you who change."
- Then, he tells the Athenians again to hang tough. He reminds them that they're unbeatable by sea and that the loss of their farms is trivial: It's the price Athens has to pay for being an imperial power. He keeps banging on about glory and about empire. It's what we call *realpolitik*—acknowledging that international relations are based on power and power alone and that ethical or moral considerations count for nothing.
- Soon afterward, the exasperated, weakened, and demoralized Athenian citizen body takes vengeance for their sufferings on Pericles by ousting him from the board of 10 generals and by fining him (though it later relents and reinstates him). Such is the fickleness of the multitude, as Thucydides points out.
- Ironically, Pericles falls victim to the plague. Does he ever come to the realization that the illness that kills him is a direct consequence of the policy he has foisted upon the Athenian people, overconfident as he was that the Spartans would quickly tire of trying to reduce Athens by siege?
- It isn't until the year 425 that the Athenians manage to capture nearly 300 Spartans and pressure the Spartan government to halt its invasions, which means that the evacuees no longer have to remain cooped up in Athens in the summer months. And it isn't until 421 that they finally make peace, although the two sides will be at war again eight years later.

## Suggested Reading

Garland, *Wandering Greeks*.

Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War*.

Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What arguments do you suppose were advanced by supporters and opponents of Pericles's proposal to evacuate Attica?
2. Imagine that you are an evacuee just arriving in Athens with your family for the first time. Describe the scene that greets your eyes.



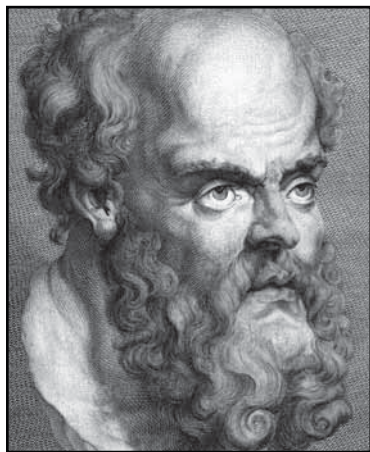
# Socrates on Trial: For the Defense

## Lecture 5

The Agora is the civic, commercial, and political heart of Athens. It's where the Athenian Council of 500 meets; it's where traders and bankers associate; it's where people shop; it's where people gossip and philosophize; and it's where the courts meet. And it's where the well-known Greek philosopher Socrates stands trial in 399 B.C.E. Socrates claims that he's been attached to Athens by "the god" and that it's his duty to rouse, persuade, and reprove the Athenian people—for not thinking clearly, for not devoting themselves to what goodness is all about.

### Socrates

- Socrates is a remarkable man. Although he's never written anything himself, his famous pupil, Plato, will use him as the principal character in the so-called dialogues, philosophical treatises in the form of imaginary debates between Socrates and various interlocutors. His extraordinary personality and method of teaching—by question and answer, what we call the Socratic method—is enormously influential.
- But for such a great and respected thinker, Socrates lacks the common touch. It's well known that he is no friend of democracy. He is forever claiming that the man on the street doesn't have the smarts to decide matters of state. But this is the opinion of many Athenians, perhaps the majority.



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**Socrates has influenced both ancient and modern philosophy, even though he never wrote anything himself.**

- In general, the Athenian democracy, which has been back in power since 403 B.C.E., has acted with exemplary restraint. It hasn't indulged in the bloodbaths common to the Greek world. It hasn't initiated a witch hunt. The only people who have been punished are the Thirty Tyrants, a repressive oligarchical government in Athens, and their henchmen. To all the rest who supported the tyranny, an amnesty has been extended.
- Even so, someone has to be the scapegoat. Socrates has had close dealings with many of the Thirty and their supporters, including Callias, the leader. So, he can be seen as the intellectual godfather of the tyranny. He's an obvious target, and because he's a busybody, he's made a lot of enemies. Punishing him will be a way of sending a strong signal that the restored democracy isn't prepared to tolerate any challenge to its authority.
- So, what we would call a show trial is about to take place in the Agora. And because Socrates is so well known, there's hardly an Athenian who isn't interested in the outcome. We can be sure that the trial attracts a great deal of public attention.
- The backstory is that a man named Meletus and a few of his cronies charged Socrates on two counts. The most trustworthy source for the wording of the charges they brought is preserved in a compendium of biographies written by Diogenes Laertius entitled *Lives and Beliefs of Eminent Philosophers*. It was written seven or eight centuries after Socrates's trial, but it's likely to be accurate.
- One of the problems about all the charges lodged against Socrates is that it isn't entirely clear what any of them mean. They aren't "crimes" in our sense of the word; rather, they represent an ad hominem attack on Socrates as a person, as an educator, as a thinker, as a controversialist—as someone who was different.
- Meletus is a man of no consequence. The actual instigator of these proceedings is Anytus, a moderate democrat but a fanatical opponent of the sophists, who teach rhetoric for pay. Socrates hates

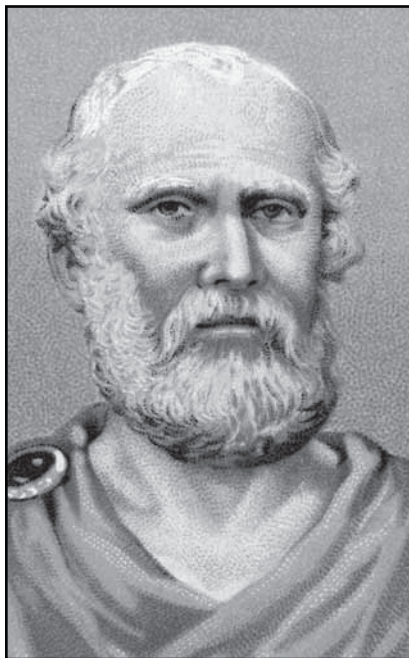
the sophists, but many people believe that he is a sophist. So, that's another problem Socrates faces: People have a false view of the way he operates and the ideas he espouses.

- Because there is no public prosecutor in Athens, “anyone who wishes” can bring a charge against anyone else. It means that there is virtually no distinction between civil and criminal law.
- Meletus has filed his suit before the *archon basileus*—the king *archon*, or magistrate—in the Stoa Basileios, the Royal Stoa, a building on the east side of the Agora. He did so at a pretrial hearing, similar to an arraignment. The purpose of the hearing is to determine whether the prosecution's case merits sending the accused to trial. The magistrate determines that there is a case to answer for and asks Socrates whether he pleads guilty or not guilty.
- “Not guilty,” Socrates replies. The king *archon* then takes written depositions from the witnesses for the prosecution, because witnesses are not cross-examined in court. The king fixes a date for the trial, which will take place in the *heliaea*, or law court, in the Agora.

## The Trial

- On the day of the trial, the jurors are assembled, and the proceedings will be directed by a judge. But the job of an Athenian judge is simply to keep order; he doesn't intervene, and he doesn't dictate the sentence. There aren't any lawyers present either. Instead, Meletus and Socrates will both speak on their own behalf. A professional speechwriter named Lysias has written a defense for Socrates. This is quite common, if one can afford it.
- Now, although there are no lawyers, public prosecutor, witnesses, cross-examination, or judge—the way we conceive of a judge—there is a very large jury, consisting of about 500 Athenians. The jurors are all men, because only men are citizens of Athens. Anyone over the age of 30 can serve. However, jurors tend to be elderly and rather conservative.

- An Athenian trial will always be wrapped up in a single day—or even half a day. That’s because the defendant and the prosecutor are granted a limited amount of time to present their case. The prosecutor always speaks first. Meletus’s speech hasn’t survived. However, we do have two versions of the speech that Socrates delivers in his defense: one written by Xenophon—a mercenary soldier, historian, and pupil of Socrates—and the other by Plato.
- Scholars generally regard Plato’s version as more authentic, but even so, it is hardly a verbatim account. No transcripts are kept of the court proceedings, added to which Socrates will speak extempore. Because Socrates is extremely prominent, it’s likely that many budding philosophers will try to promote their image of the great man by writing their own versions of his defense. Xenophon tells us that he writes his version as a corrective to previous versions.
- We call the speech that Socrates delivers the *Apology*, from the Greek word *apologia*. It does not mean the same thing as the English word “apology”; *apologia* merely means “the speech that comes after,” or “the speech in response.”
- Meletus’s task is to justify the charges that he and his cronies are bringing against Socrates. Although all are very serious,



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**The ancient Greek philosopher Plato was a student of Socrates and a teacher of Aristotle.**

all are based on hearsay; there's no hard evidence for any of the accusations. The first charge is that Socrates doesn't "acknowledge the gods whom the state acknowledges."

- In this context, "acknowledge" means that Socrates doesn't participate in any of the great state-sponsored festivals that take place in Athens. Because Athens is a participatory democracy, its citizens are expected—and required—to participate in all state-run activities.
- Next, Meletus accuses Socrates of "introducing new daimonic beings." That's a reference to his personal *daimonion*, an unidentified divine being that apparently speaks to him and to him alone, warning him when he's about to do something that is wrong. This is a problem for Athenians because religion comes under the control of the state. You can't worship whatever god you choose; it has to be one that is officially recognized.
- Lastly, Socrates is accused of "perverting" (subverting) the young. Several of Plato's dialogues take place in a palaestra, where athletic training and intellectual discussion get mixed together. Meletus is likely accusing Socrates of encouraging young men to despise democracy.
- But the beauty of this charge, like the others, is that it is vague. Socrates, by his sheer visibility, has gotten people's backs up. He clearly has his own views about democracy, and he clearly has his own (somewhat eccentric) views about religion.
- So, the prosecution rests, and Socrates rises to deliver his defense. First, he says that he's facing two sets of accusers: Meletus—along with the others who have brought the current charges against him—and the sophists, who teach people how to win an argument even if their case has no merit.
- Socrates loathes the sophists because they deny that there is such a thing as absolute right and wrong and because they charge for their

services. Socrates maintains that wisdom, which is what he claims to be teaching, should be dispensed free of charge.

- The rest of Socrates's speech is unashamedly combative. He claims that he's performed a valuable public service by lecturing the Athenians on their inadequacies. And he warns them that as long as he breathes, he will never stop practicing philosophy and exhorting people to discover the truth.
- When Socrates sits down, the place is in an uproar. There's probably a lot of heckling going on. In addition to the approximately 500 jurors within, there's a large crowd gathered outside the open-air court. Plato claims that he and other friends of Socrates witness the proceedings, perhaps in a semiofficial capacity as supporters of the defendant.

### The Verdict and Sentence

- The jury doesn't retire to deliberate. It decides immediately—and votes straightaway. And it votes on the indictment as a whole, not on individual charges. Once the moment arrives, a herald calls for silence, and the magistrate announces the verdict: 220 have voted to acquit Socrates, and 280 find him guilty.
- At this point, the accuser and the defendant are each invited to recommend a punishment. The accuser gets up first and recommends the death penalty. The defendant is expected to recommend a more lenient penalty. He's also expected to make a tearful appeal, producing his wife and offspring in court.
- But Socrates never plays by the rules. Instead, he recommends that he should be rewarded for the great service he has performed on behalf of the Athenian state. And he refuses to make a pitiful appeal by dragging his wife and children into court.
- You can imagine the shouting, stamping, and booing that this generates. According to Plato, Socrates is eventually persuaded to recommend a very modest fine—one mina in Greek money—

whereupon his friends increase the payment to 30 minas. By now, the damage is done, however. Socrates is stating that he doesn't respect the authority of the court. It's a calculated and studied insult.

- So, the jurors vote again. This time, the vote for execution increases by 60. Upon learning the verdict, Socrates tells the Athenians that they haven't gained very much, because he's an old man and will die soon anyway. He further claims that the verdict that posterity will pass on the trial is that the jury voted to execute a wise man. And then he passes judgment in turn on his accusers, saying that the truth condemns them as vile and unjust men.
- Socrates then treats the jury to his thoughts about death. Death is nothing to fear, he says. It's either nonexistence or a simple migration from one place to another. And if it's a migration, then what have we to fear? We'll find ourselves in the company of people like Homer and Hesiod, and what wouldn't we give to meet them? He ends by delivering this memorable line: "And so we part. You to life, me to death. But which of us goes to a better destiny, only the god knows."
- Usually, a sentence of execution in Athens is carried out immediately. On this occasion, however, the condemned man will remain in prison for about a month. That is because his trial happens to take place on the same day that a ship sails from Athens to the island of Delos—considered sacred because it is the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis—to commemorate the killing of the Minotaur by Theseus, an early Athenian king. The Athenians fear that if Socrates is executed on the same day that the ship sets sail, the vessel will become polluted and then pollute Delos when it arrives there.
- Socrates is hauled off to the state prison, where he will remain until execution day. On the last day of Socrates's life—the day after the sacred ship has returned from Delos—his friends come to visit him, as well as his wife Xanthippe and his three children. The executioner administers the fatal dose of hemlock, which Socrates drinks in one gulp.

## Suggested Reading

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*.

Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How do you think you would have voted at Socrates's trial if you were an ordinary nonphilosophical Athenian?
2. What are the main weaknesses of the Athenian jury system?



# Conspiracy! Murder of Philip II

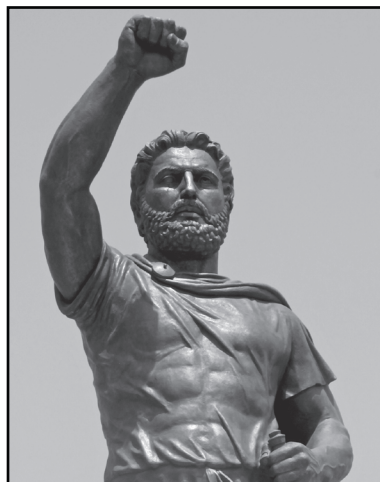
## Lecture 6

**M**urder always holds a grim fascination over the human imagination, even when it has taken place long ago. In this lecture, you will examine Philip II's murder as if it were what forensic experts call a cold case, one that has gone unsolved—in this instance, for more than 2,000 years. But it's not that the identity of the assassin is unknown. What is unknown, however, is the assassin's motive and whether he acted alone or on orders.

### King Philip II's Murder

- It's July 336 B.C.E. in the theater at Aegae—in Macedonia, in northern Greece. Aegae is an ancient and venerable site. It's where the kings of Macedonia are buried. Today is a great festal occasion. The audience has come from far and wide to witness athletic and musical contests hosted by Philip II, king of Macedonia.
- Yesterday, Philip's daughter Cleopatra married her maternal uncle, Alexander, king of the Molossians. Marriage between uncles and nieces is common in the Greek world. And besides, this is a dynastic marriage—a marriage intended to cement relations between the Macedonians and the neighboring Molossians.
- Today, wealthy aristocrats and dignitaries are sitting in the front seats of the theater, with the Macedonians seated behind. When the Sun rises, a trumpet blast pierces the air, and a choir bursts into song. To this musical accompaniment, 12 dazzling statues of the 12 Olympian gods are carried into the theater. But there's a 13<sup>th</sup> statue—a statue of Philip himself.
- Then, Philip enters the theater to another (this time almost deafening) fanfare. He's flanked on one side by his 20-year old son, Alexander—the future Alexander the Great—and on the other by his new son-in-law, also named Alexander.

- Philip is also accompanied by bodyguards. But as soon as he reaches the center of the *orchestra* of the theater, meaning the circular dancing space, he orders his bodyguards to stand aside. After all, what does he have to fear? Everyone in the theater is clapping, stamping, and cheering—the visitors out of politeness, and the Macedonians out of genuine feeling.



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- Philip is very powerful, and you wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of him. But he's also enormously popular with his own people. That's because Macedonia was nothing until Philip II came to the throne 23 years ago. It was a backward state on the edge of the Greek world dominated by its more powerful neighbors, the Illyrians and the Molossians.
- The murder of King Philip II was controversial; it was debated whether the killer acted alone or with accomplices.**
- So-called real Greeks—Athenians, Corinthians, Thebans, Spartans, and so on—don't think of the Macedonians as true Greeks. Before Philip came along, the Macedonians lived in villages, were semiliterate, and produced little art. But thanks to Philip, the Athenians, the Corinthians, and their like can't look down on the Macedonians anymore. Macedonia has more power over the Greek mainland than any single state has ever exercised before. Its phenomenal rise is due almost wholly to Philip himself.
  - Philip, who is 46 years old, is today at the pinnacle of his success, both politically and militarily. Physically, he is a bit of a wreck; he has sustained several injuries in battle. And like most Macedonians, he is a heavy drinker. But despite his injuries, he is—as far as we know—

healthy and fit, and at the top of his game. As for his personality, he's pretty violent. He gets into towering rages, especially when drunk.

- Even so, he's done a lot for his people, and he's made them feel good about being Macedonian. On the domestic front, Philip married his (possibly) seventh wife, Cleopatra (the same name, coincidentally, as his daughter) a year ago, and she has just given birth to a daughter named Europa.
- Unlike King Henry VIII in England, Philip doesn't need to get a divorce each time he takes a new wife or pay alimony, because the Macedonian royal house practices polygamy. Of course, this means that there is plenty of intrigue going on at court, with his various wives all wanting to promote their own offspring as the next king of Macedonia.
- To complicate matters, Philip is also having love affairs with men—bisexuality is fairly common in the Greek world—and this may well be what leads to his downfall.
- We see Philip and his reign largely through the eyes of contemporary Athenians—they are the Greeks who chiefly interact with him and who alone have left a literary testimony—and also through the words of later non-Macedonian writers.
- We don't have a Macedonian account of Philip's reign, or indeed any Macedonian testimony of any period. Macedonia hasn't left us any literature. In consequence, we know very little about the internal structure of the Macedonian kingdom during Philip's reign, for the very good reason that it wasn't of interest to anyone outside of Macedonia.
- On this day in the theater at Aegae—with everybody stamping, cheering, and clapping—Philip is standing at the center spot with his son on one side and his son-in-law on the other. And just at the moment when he is beginning to believe his own propaganda and perhaps even thinking of himself as a god, history turns on a dime.

- One of the members of Philip's bodyguard runs forward and stabs the king in the chest. Everyone gasps in horror. Philip staggers to the ground, staining the beaten earth as he falls. His son Alexander rushes forward to grasp him. Everyone is crowding around the body. Everything is confusion and turmoil.
- A moment later, people flee from the theater in panic. The immediate fear is that this is a plan to take over the throne. Philip isn't short of enemies—either at home or in the Greek world at large. There may well be other conspirators, with other targets in mind. Perhaps there's going to be a general bloodletting.

### The Motive

- The assassin is a member of Philip's personal security detail. He was very well trusted. His name is Pausanias. What is unknown is his motive and whether Pausanias acted alone or on orders—and, if so, on orders from whom.
- One explanation, proposed by a historian named Diodorus Siculus (Diodorus of Sicily), who lived 300 years later, is that Pausanias craves celebrity. A more compelling motive, also reported by Diodorus, and endorsed by Aristotle—Philip's contemporary and the one-time tutor of Alexander the Great—is that Pausanias killed Philip in a fit of jealousy.
- The story goes that Pausanias had been Philip's lover. Philip rejected him—probably several years earlier—and began an affair with another man, who, coincidentally, is also named Pausanias. Pausanias the jilted lover reputedly began mocking Pausanias, calling him effeminate, debauched, and so on. This bullying drove the new lover to such despair that he decided to commit suicide—which he did in battle, by heroically stepping in front of Philip to save his life at a moment when blows from several quarters were raining down on him.

- To get even, a high-ranking friend of the dead Pausanias named Attalus invites the surviving Pausanias, the jilted lover, to dinner, gets him drunk, and then gets his muleteers to gang-rape him. Pausanias complains bitterly to Philip, but to little avail. Philip doesn't want to alienate Attalus, whom Philip has just appointed general. So, he tries to appease Pausanias.
- He does so by promoting Pausanias, by making him one of his bodyguards. But Pausanias is deeply hurt. He thinks himself treated shamefully by Philip: first by his rejection and second by his refusal to punish Attalus. So, he avenges himself against Philip in the most public way possible.
- But is the murder of Philip due entirely to a personal grievance held by a jilted lover? Perhaps, but there are other tantalizing possibilities. The historian Justin—who wrote probably in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E.—claims that Pausanias is suborned by Philip's wife Olympias, the mother both of Alexander the Great and of the newly wedded Cleopatra.
- There are some very good reasons why Olympias would want her husband dead at this precise moment—apart from the fact that they have always had a very tempestuous marriage. One of these reasons is the fact that Philip only recently married Cleopatra, his seventh wife, who happens to be the niece of Attalus (who reputedly engineered the gang rape of Pausanias and whom Philip had appointed general).
- The new wife Cleopatra is about 30 years younger than Philip, and Olympias is understandably deeply jealous, all the more so because the new wife has already given birth to a daughter. Philip dotes on her, we're told. So, inevitably, Olympias feels rejected.
- To make matters worse, Olympias seems to be extremely vindictive by nature. There's also evidence to suggest that she's been working on her son, the future Alexander the Great, to make him dislike his

father. Olympias has every reason to fear that if Cleopatra bears Philip a son, that son will replace her son Alexander as the heir to the Macedonian throne. This gives Alexander a motive to kill his father, as well.

### After the Murder

- Philip falls to the ground and dies almost instantly. No one knows what's going to happen next. The questions on everyone's mind are: Was the killer acting alone, or did he have accomplices? And is Philip's son Alexander also a target?
- Pausanias flees from the theater and is pursued by Philip's bodyguards. He has left his horses tethered at the gate, not far from the theater. He's just about to mount one when his foot becomes trapped in a vine, and he falls to the ground. The other bodyguards rush upon Pausanias while he's still struggling to free himself. They raise him to his feet, and then each of them spears him. And he dies instantly.
- The news of Philip's murder spreads like wildfire. In the Greek world at large, there is an understandable belief that Macedonia is going to implode. Several states try to throw off the Macedonian yoke. However, Macedonia does not implode—nor is there any prolonged controversy over the succession. This is largely due to the initiative of Philip's trusted lieutenant, a man named Antipater.
- After the assassination, Antipater immediately orders the arrest of some alleged accomplices, and then—without a trial or any inquiry—promptly has them executed. Under the circumstances, it is probably the best thing to do. In addition, Antipater immediately presents Philip's son Alexander to the army, which hails him as king. The fact that Antipater has been close to Philip helps Alexander secure the throne uncontested.

- The future Alexander the Great now proceeds to carry out a purge of all those who were connected with Pausanias, but he also murders all those who stand to benefit from his father's death. He leaves it up to Olympias to murder Philip's widow, Cleopatra, and her young daughter, Europa.
- So, it seems highly likely that Alexander was in on the plot against his father. But conclusive evidence is lacking. The official view of the Macedonians is that a jilted lover—perhaps acting singly, perhaps with accomplices—has murdered Philip. But there must be many people who don't buy into this explanation: those who accept various conspiracy theories, who see it as rather too convenient that Pausanias is killed immediately after the assassination. This prevents him from testifying at a trial.

### Suggested Reading

Gabriel, *Philip II of Macedonia*.

Worthington, *Philip II of Macedonia*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Did the assassination of Philip II change the course of history in any significant way?
2. What do you think would have been the reaction of the Macedonian people, the Greeks, the visiting dignitaries, the royal family, and the army to the assassination of Philip II?

# Alexander the Great: Punjab Revolt

## Lecture 7

The year is 326 B.C.E., and we are with Alexander the Great and his army at the Hyphasis River in northeast India. The Hyphasis, whose modern name is the Beas, is one of five rivers that give the Punjab its name: “Punjab” means “Land of Five Waters.” At this point, Alexander has conquered the Persian Empire—the largest empire the world has ever known—but that is not enough for him. However, his men have given him seven years of blood, sweat, and toil, and they refuse to go one step further. Alexander has never been beaten, in argument or in battle. Who will win this battle of nerves?

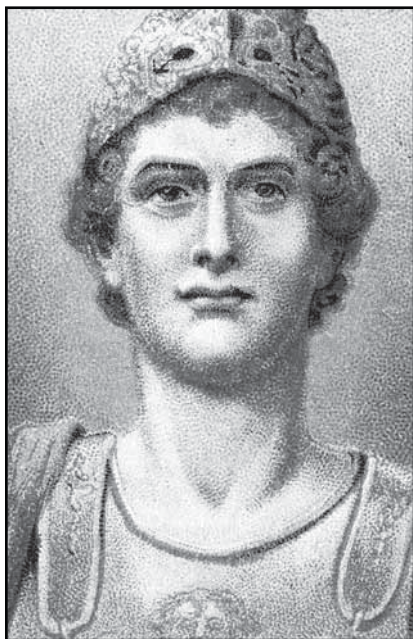
### Alexander the Great

- Alexander became king of Macedonia after the assassination of his father, Philip II, in 336 B.C.E. He was 20 years old at the time. Two years later, he and his army crossed over into Asia to conduct the war that his father had envisaged. We have varying accounts of the size of this force, but it wasn’t particularly large—perhaps around 40,000 men with 5,000 cavalry. It is certainly small compared with the Persian army that he would do battle with. And yet, as a result, he changed the world.
- Alexander has unshakeable self-confidence, which he communicates to his men, who believe in him completely. As a general, he always leads from the front. He also prepares carefully for each battle he fights. He must be highly intelligent, because his tutor was the philosopher Aristotle. He is immensely hardworking; indeed, his will to succeed is colossal. He is relentless in the pursuit of his goals.
- Alexander is also intensely religious. And he can be generous in victory. There is, however, a much darker side to Alexander’s personality: He has a violent temper, is ruthless in the treatment of his enemies, has a drinking problem, and is probably mentally



unbalanced. In other words, he is a bundle of contradictions. And those contradictions are all the more pronounced because of the force of his will.

- Nothing written by Alexander himself has survived. And although more than 20 contemporaries would write books on Alexander, not one of them has survived. And, of course, we know nothing about Alexander from the Persian side.
- We'll probably never know what his goal in life was. Scholars have variously claimed that he was eager to spread Greek culture throughout his conquered territories; that he aimed to fuse the Greeks and the Persians into a single race; that he craved world domination; or, most improbably, that he was inspired by the dream of universal brotherhood.
- Whether he was a force for good or bad is a matter of endless debate. What is undeniable is that Alexander's legacy lives on—both in terms of the power of his personality and in the spread of Greek culture as far as India, which came about as a consequence of his conquests.



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**Alexander the Great, who ruled Macedonia from 336 to 323 B.C.E., is remembered for his extraordinary military achievements.**

## Alexander's Victories

- As soon as Alexander comes to the throne, he eliminates rival claimants and puts down an insurrection by Thebes—a city in central Greece—which he utterly destroys. Then, in the spring of 334, he leads his army across the Hellespont—the stretch of water that divides Europe from Asia—which King Xerxes crossed a century and a half earlier when he invaded Greece, marching in the opposite direction.
- Alexander then wins three major victories against the Persians. After the second triumph at the River Issus in 333, the Persian king Darius III offers to share his empire with him by ceding all of his territory west of the River Halys, about half of what is modern-day Turkey.
- Alexander rejects the offer and presses on south into modern-day Syria, capturing the city of Tyre after a seven-month siege. Darius makes a new offer to give up the whole of his empire west of the Euphrates, the river that rises in eastern Turkey and empties into the Persian Gulf. He also offers Alexander his daughter's hand in marriage.
- Once again, Alexander turns him down. He captures Jerusalem before invading Egypt, which falls to him without a struggle. He is now viewed as a god in the eyes of the Egyptians, because the pharaoh—whom Alexander supplants as the conqueror of Egypt—is regarded as the incarnation of Horus, the son of Ra and the beloved of Ammon.
- Launching an attack on Persia was an enormous gamble with no certain outcome. Most Greeks would have thought such an undertaking reckless and ill judged. And it was his father's idea. The late King Philip had been about to lead the expedition against Persia when he was assassinated.
- Furthermore, there was a big difference between the two men. While Philip was a seasoned warrior, Alexander, by contrast, was

relatively untested. He had only just established himself as king. And he might prudently have decided that he should play it safe, rather than take on a new challenge. But as for prudence, he didn't know the meaning of the word.



**Alexander the Great conquered many lands and destroyed the Persian Empire with his army.**

## Alexander's Last Victory

- In 331, Alexander wins his last great victory over Darius and the Persians at Gaugamela, on the River Tigris, near Mosul in modern-day Iraq. He follows this up by burning down the great palace at Persepolis. Shortly afterward, Darius is assassinated, and Alexander proclaims himself king of Persia.
- At this point, Alexander could turn his attention to integrating the Persians into his now-vast empire, but he doesn't. He's a restless spirit and wants to conquer new lands. So, he undertakes two expeditions: the first to Bactria (the modern-day equivalent of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and the second to India in 327.
- India isn't part of the Persian Empire. It had been once, but the Persians abandoned it long before Alexander appeared on the scene. All that we can say of the expedition from a military point of view is that Alexander is reaffirming the traditional Persian claim to the region around the Indus Valley.
- Before setting out for India in 327 B.C.E., the young Alexander has to crush an uprising in Sogdiana, a province of the former Persian Empire in what today is Uzbekistan. He does so ruthlessly—massacring, enslaving, and deporting the population. He then marches toward the Hindu Kush, the great mountain range that runs northeast to southwest, from western Afghanistan into northeast Pakistan, about 500 miles in length and as much as 150 miles in breadth.
- It is at the Hydaspes River in the Punjab, in northern India, where Alexander wins his final victory, against a local king named Porus. It is a spectacular victory, but it is also costly, because Porus and his men fight so valiantly. Alexander later restores Porus's kingdom to him, and he even expands it as a mark of his respect and admiration. He remains in the region just long enough to found two cities.

## **The Hyphasis River**

- This last victory might have been accomplishment enough, but not for Alexander. He now continues eastward for another 100 miles until he comes to the Hyphasis River in northeast India. Alexander's men have been with him ever since he set out from Macedonia. Against impossible odds, they've destroyed the Persian Empire. They've never been beaten in battle. They've traipsed more than 12,000 miles in all.
- And Alexander is still demanding more of the men. He wants to take them on one last march. And this one will be the worst of all. It's the monsoon season, and it has been raining for days on end. The storms are violent, and many of his men have been struck by lightning. Disease, particularly malaria and dysentery, is rife.
- When Alexander's army arrives at the Hyphasis, the river is in full torrent because of the rains, and the men refuse to go a step further. It isn't just exhaustion and debilitation; it's also the fear of what they might encounter on the other side of the river. They have heard that two kings are waiting to oppose them with a combined force of 200,000 infantry, 80,000 cavalry, 8,000 war chariots, and 6,000 elephants. (There's probably no truth to the rumor, but that doesn't matter.) They have no wish to fight another full-scale battle.
- At first, Alexander tries to bribe the men. He lets them off the leash so that they can plunder, rape, and murder in the neighboring villages to their hearts' content. He also promises them lots of bounty. This placates them for a while, but it isn't a lasting solution. The men remain disgruntled.
- As the tension builds, one man has the courage to come to Alexander's tent to express the army's grievances. He's a veteran officer named Coenus who has served under Alexander for 20 years. He's Alexander's right-hand man, but he's also greatly respected by the rank and file.

- Coenus speaks passionately about the army's grievances and warns Alexander that if he compels the men to continue, they will become unreliable. Although he fails to dissuade Alexander from going on, he has sown doubt in Alexander's mind. Shortly afterward, Alexander calls an assembly and harangues his men about the fruits of further conquest. Hoping to shame them, Alexander says that he is prepared to go it alone if they desert him, but that they are in sight of achieving their goal of reaching the ends of the earth.
- This time, Alexander's rhetoric fails to inspire the men. His arguments are greeted with stony silence. The next morning, Alexander summons his officers and tells them that he will go on alone with anyone who will follow him and that those who won't go on can tell their friends that they abandoned their king when he was surrounded by the enemy.
- But this doesn't do any good, either. His officers stand their ground. They don't give in. So, Alexander retires to his tent and sulks, expecting that the army will change its mind. His men surround his tent and somehow persuade him to give in. Eventually, Alexander recognizes that his grand adventure is over. He has been defeated not by the enemy but by his own men.
- Alexander the Great could not be seen bowing to the will of mere mortals. So, he performs a sacrifice, ostensibly to determine whether the omens are favorable for continuing his journey. He discovers, unsurprisingly, that they are not, and he announces to the army that he is going to turn back. It is the gods who disapprove of the expedition. The army, we are told, receives the news with tears of joy.
- And now Alexander and his men begin the long trek home. They journey not by the route they have taken to get here but instead head south to the Indian Ocean. Alexander's biographer Plutarch claims that three-quarters of the men perish on the way back. Although this is an exaggeration, there is no doubt that the Indian adventure



costs Alexander thousands of lives and that it is a major logistical blunder. In fact, Alexander himself nearly dies.

- The episode at the Hyphasis River is significant because it is the moment at which Alexander has to face a very unpalatable truth: that he is not a god. He is subject to the will of others. He cannot invariably get his own way.
- Plutarch tells us that shortly before his death, Alexander drinks nine pints of undiluted wine. He's then struck by a fever that rages for 10 days and lapses into a coma. Alexander dies in Babylon on June 10, 323, after suffering 10 days of fever provoked by a long bout of drinking. The cause of his death remains a subject of lively controversy. Possible candidates are poison, meningitis, bacterial infection, and malaria.
- He is just 32 years old. And his reign has lasted for only 13 years. And yet he is one of the greatest forces for change in the whole of human history.
- Alexander leaves behind an empire that stretches from the Adriatic Sea in the west to the Punjab in the east and from southern Russia in the north to Ethiopia in the south. That is no mean achievement. But it is probably a great deal less than what he had hoped for.
- And the legacy of Alexander the Great is not confined to his phenomenal military achievements. He sets a personal standard for leadership against which aspiring individuals, kings, and generals measure themselves virtually to this day.

### Suggested Reading

Fox, *Alexander the Great*.

Martin and Blackwell, *Alexander the Great*.

Prevas, *Envy of the Gods*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Who was greater: Philip or Alexander?
2. How might the world be different if Alexander's army had not mutinied and he had crossed the Hyphasis River?



# Pyrrhus: Deadly Dreams of Empire

## Lecture 8

The year is 280 B.C.E. King Pyrrhus of Epirus has sailed from northwest Greece to confront the emerging power of Rome, which is situated far to the north but is meddling in the affairs of the Greek city-states of southern Italy. King Pyrrhus rules a Greek—or at least semi-Greek—people called the Molossians and has a sizeable force under his command, consisting of 25,000 infantry, 3,000 cavalry, and 20 elephants. It's an important moment in world history—the moment when the Greek settlements in southern Italy decide whether to defend their independence against the rising power of Rome.

### King Pyrrhus

- Pyrrhus sees himself as the Greeks' savior, so he's on a mission. But that's not all. Pyrrhus is very much interested in himself. He has a very big dream: He believes that he could be every bit as great as—or even greater than—Alexander the Great. He plans to pick up where Alexander left off half a century earlier. But whereas Alexander went east to conquer the Persian Empire—and got as far as India—Pyrrhus is heading west to Italy.
- Our major source for Pyrrhus's career is the Greek biographer Plutarch, who lives in the late 1<sup>st</sup> to early 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E.—about 400 years after Pyrrhus's death. Plutarch is not very good at describing battles, but he fully grasps Pyrrhus's importance and provides us with a convincing and compelling portrait of a deeply flawed man.
- Pyrrhus was born in 319 B.C.E. He is a second cousin of Alexander the Great. The kingdom he rules, called Epirus, is a region in northwest Greece controlled by a people called the Molossians. The Molossians aren't formed into a polis or city-state like the Athenians and the Spartans, for example. Instead, they constitute

a number of tribes that formed a loose federation. We don't know much about the Molossians. They are rather backward, culturally speaking, compared with most other Greeks of the time.

- Pyrrhus seems to be one of those people who is never satisfied, who is always looking for trouble, rather like Alexander the Great—equally restless and energetic, but not half as talented. Pyrrhus is a highly gifted tactician, both on and off the field. He's as fearless as he is unscrupulous.
- Pyrrhus is also a dreamer. He sees himself as the champion of the Greeks and wants to rid the predominantly Greek cities in southern Italy of Rome's increasing dominance.
- Over time, Pyrrhus succeeds in extending his kingdom both to the north and to the south by taking over Ambrachia, Amphilochoia, and Acarnania (which is pretty much all of the western half of northern central Greece). He also tries to conquer Macedonia, the kingdom of Alexander the Great. He's initially successful, but he's unable to secure his gains in Macedonia.

### **An Appeal for Help**

- Southern Italy has become so thickly settled by the Greeks that it has acquired the name Magna Graecia, "Great Greece." The term is usually used to describe all the Greek city-states, or poleis, between Capua in the west and Tarentum in the east. Each polis is autonomous, and although they share similar cultures and comparable political organization, they rarely cooperate with one another and do not constitute a counterweight to the growing power of Rome.
- Initially, when the Greek cities settled, they dominated the indigenous non-Greek peoples living in southern Italy. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, however, these non-Greeks—primarily the Lucanians and the Brutii—were beginning to rise up.

- It was at this time, too, that Rome began to flex its muscles in southern Italy. A Roman consul named Lucius Aemilius Barbula marched into Tarentine territory, situated in the instep of Italy, and began ravaging it. Tarentum—modern Taranto—was the most powerful of the Greek settlements in southern Italy. There was justifiable suspicion that Rome was seeking to establish a pro-Roman government in the city.
- It's now that Pyrrhus receives an appeal for help. At the time, he's still trying to establish control over Macedonia. But this wasn't working out well. So, being the opportunist he is, Pyrrhus abandons his claim on Macedonia and turns his attention west.
- Pyrrhus accepts the offer to come to the aid of Tarentum. He presents his forthcoming campaign to the Greek world at large as a grandiose Panhellenic (all-Greek) enterprise, whose objective is to liberate the Greeks from oppression by a barbarian power—namely, Rome.
- This gets him the support of the Epirote League, an alliance of states that makes up Epirus, which includes the Molossian heartland. He needs the league's consent in order to use its troops to wage war in Italy. His appeal also gets him the support of several Greek states outside of Italy, whose rulers are beginning to eye Rome with suspicion.
- In the spring of 280, Pyrrhus sets sail from Epirus with great fanfare. Although the Molossians and their neighbors form the core of his army, Pyrrhus also has a sizeable contingent of mercenaries. When his fleet crosses the Adriatic to the Italian mainland, however, a severe storm causes the armada to disperse.
- As a result, he arrives in Tarentum with only a part of his force. Even so, the Tarentines are overjoyed to see him, and they appoint him commander in chief. He responds by putting the city on a war footing and introducing measures for its protection. He drafts all able-bodied men and imposes a harsh system of discipline on the new recruits.

- When word of Pyrrhus's arrival reaches the Romans, they become deeply concerned. Life has not been easy for them of late. Less than a decade earlier, they finally saw off another serious threat by delivering the coup de grace to the Samnites, a warlike Italian people who inhabit the central southern part of the mountain range known as the Apennines. And the Romans are still engaged in warfare with their Etruscan neighbors to the north.
- Rome doesn't have enough conscripts to make war against Pyrrhus. Its practice at this early date is to restrict military service to those who meet certain property qualifications, but now, the danger is so great that Rome conscripts citizens who are not property owners: the *proletarii*. The conscripts receive very limited training, and it's unlikely they have any armor. Still, they help to swell the ranks.
- The two armies eventually face each other outside of Heraclea, a coastal city to the southwest of Tarentum. We don't know many details of the battle. Although Pyrrhus's troops are outnumbered, they squarely beat the Romans. One deciding factor is his elephants. Pyrrhus stations them at his force's wings, and they strike terror into the Roman legionaries. Another deciding factor is Pyrrhus himself, who stirs his men by the example of his fearlessness.
- At the end of the day, 7,000 Roman dead lie scattered across the battlefield and another 1,800 are taken prisoner. The problem is that the carnage on Pyrrhus's side is hardly less devastating. He's lost 4,000 men—hence, the term "Pyrrhic victory" refers to a conquest that comes at great cost.

### The Beginning of the End

- Pyrrhus is now master of southern Italy. And a number of Greek cities that previously wavered come over to his side, and so do the non-Greek peoples in the region, including the Brutii, the Lucanians, and even the Samnites to the north.
- Pyrrhus marches north, in the direction of Rome, but without any clear purpose, it seems. This is where things start to fall apart.

Pyrrhus fails to persuade any of Rome's allies in this area to desert to his side. He is probably hoping to make common cause with the Etruscans, but nothing comes of it.

- The Greek historian Appian tells us that the Roman Senate will deliberate for a long time over whether to accept the peace terms he offers. The Senate eventually rejects Pyrrhus's terms and accepts volunteers for two new legions.
- Pyrrhus gives up and withdraws south. Over the following winter, he manages to acquire more mercenaries, whom he pays by imposing a levy on the Greek cities he's protecting. His force now numbers about 40,000 men.
- In the spring of 279, he marches to Ausculum, about 100 miles north of Tarentum, where he's confronted by a Roman army. Another bloody engagement takes place, lasting for two days, and Pyrrhus again leads from the front. But this time, he sustains a serious injury. Still, he wins the battle. Roman losses are about 6,000. On Pyrrhus's side, they amount to 3,500. It's another Pyrrhic victory.
- The following year, Pyrrhus receives an appeal from Syracuse, a city on the east coast of Sicily. The Syracusans want help in a war they're waging against the Carthaginians, whose home is in modern-day Tunisia. The Carthaginians already control the western part of Sicily and are now eager to gain mastery of the eastern part as well.
- At the time, the Carthaginians are allied to the Romans. So, Pyrrhus answers the Syracusan appeal. He achieves some success initially. But by installing military garrisons and seeking to set himself up as a tyrant, he angers the Sicilian Greeks. And they decide to make common cause with the Carthaginians against him. It turns out to be another wasted exercise.
- In 276, Pyrrhus sets sail for mainland Italy in response to an urgent summons from those Greek cities in the south he originally

befriended. Just as he's leaving Sicily, however, his fleet is surprised by the Carthaginians, and many of his warships are destroyed.

- He tries to take Rhegium—a Greek city on the toe of Italy that is controlled by the Romans—but fails, and soon afterward, his army is ambushed, resulting in more losses.
- Pyrrhus now makes one last bid to drive the Romans out of the south of Italy. He marches into Samnite territory, hoping again to press onto Rome. But when he reaches Maleventum—modern Benevento, in Campania—he finds his way barred by the Romans. Heavily outnumbered, his army is no match for the enemy.
- This time, the Romans use Pyrrhus's elephants against him by firing burning arrows so that the elephants turn around in terror and stampede the invaders. We don't know how many casualties Pyrrhus sustains on this occasion, but it's enough to cause him to give up and head back to Epirus.
- Although Pyrrhus leaves a small garrison at Tarentum, the dream is over. He has been seen off by the sheer numbers of men that the Romans have been able to put in the field.
- Pyrrhus's restless energy is not entirely curbed, however. He now turns his attention to trying to make himself master of mainland Greece, claiming that it is his intention to free its people from the control of Antigonas Gonatas, the king of Macedonia.
- Several towns ally with him, and he succeeds in deposing Antigonas. But shortly afterward, he inflames public opinion by raiding the royal tombs at Aegae, where Philip II and other members of the Macedonian royal house lie buried.
- Pyrrhus then marches south into the Peloponnese and makes an unsuccessful attempt to seize Sparta at the invitation of Cleonymus, a Spartan pretender to the throne. Sparta at this time is nothing like the military power it was in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. But it resists him anyway.

- Thwarted, Pyrrhus marches on to Argos, a city in the northeast Peloponnese, intending to seize it. Here, he is slain in a street fight by a woman who throws a tile at him just as he is about to kill her son. It is a sad, and rather pathetic, end to what in essence was a wasted career.
- In the same year as Pyrrhus dies, the former Greek colony of Tarentum falls to the Romans. If Pyrrhus had realized his dream of establishing a Greek empire in Italy, many things would have turned out very differently. He did much to Hellenize Epirus—that is, to introduce it to Greek culture—as Alexander the Great Hellenized the East.
- But in the final calculation, the Greeks would probably have been a lot better off had Pyrrhus never left Epirus to answer their appeal for help. His career has the unfortunate—for him—consequence of strengthening Rome’s control over Greek-settled southern Italy. On the positive side, the trouncing of Pyrrhus paves the way for much closer cultural and economic contact between the Greeks and the Romans.

### Suggested Reading

Champion, *Pyrrhus of Epirus*.

Garouphalias, *Pyrrhus*.

### Questions to Consider

1. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “character is destiny.” To what extent was Pyrrhus’s career the consequence of his character, and to what extent did contingency shape it?
2. Pyrrhus’s life has been described as one of “heroic failure.” To what extent was it heroic?

# India's Ashoka the Great Repents

## Lecture 9

About two centuries after the time of the Buddha—and two millennia before Mahatma Gandhi—the Indian subcontinent gave the world a man known as Ashoka the Great. He unified almost the entire subcontinent, and his rule extended as far as Afghanistan in the west to Bengal in the east. He advocated Buddhist ideals, and he left behind a legacy of peaceful coexistence that has hardly been matched in world history. However, Ashoka is today a nearly forgotten emperor who spent the second half of his life atoning for the harm he caused during the first half.

### Ashoka's Rise to Power

- In the year 261 B.C.E., Ashoka has been on the throne for seven or eight years. He is the son of the Mauryan emperor Bindusara and the grandson of the founder of the Mauryan Dynasty, Chandragupta Maurya. During his reign, Ashoka has not yet fought any foreign wars, but he's eager to expand his realm. So, he sends a blunt message to a kingdom called Kalinga, situated in central-eastern India, on the Bay of Bengal.
- Although Kalinga is ruled by a king, it has a democratic government. Ashoka demands that its people submit to his authority. Ashoka's grandfather, Chandragupta, tried previously to annex Kalinga and failed. But Ashoka will not be denied. And when the kingdom chooses to defend itself rather than to submit, he unleashes a vast army that goes on a killing spree and turns the Daya River—which runs next to the battleground—bloodred.
- Unlike virtually every other conquering warlord who gloats over his victory, Ashoka is unexpectedly shattered by the destruction he wreaks. His personal journey is one not of conquest but of redemption. Even so, his legacy will come close to extinction in the millennia that follow his death, almost up until the present day.



- And it remains perpetually at risk in the interim, because the only record we have of his accomplishments survives in inscriptions, mostly carved in a writing system that became unreadable centuries ago. That writing system is the Brahmi script, which records the ancient language of Prakrit, the official language of Ashoka's court. His 33 inscriptions are known as the Edicts of Ashoka, some of which are inscribed in caves while others are found on pillars and boulders that are subject to erosion.
- Ashoka's grandfather, Chandragupta, born in about the year 340 B.C.E., established the Mauryan Dynasty that unified most of modern-day India. As a young man, Chandragupta attracted the attention of an influential philosopher named Chanakya, who educated him in military tactics and groomed him to become a leader—one who would eventually destroy the Nanda Empire that held sway over modern-day northern India.
- In 322, Chandragupta fulfilled his mentor's vision in defeating the Nanda Dynasty and seizing the throne. He then succeeded in liberating the region to the west of the Indus River in modern-day Pakistan, which had been conquered by Alexander and which today we call Baluchistan.
- By about 316, Chandragupta had taken control of the lands of the retreating occupiers and was extending his empire to the edge of Central Asia. At the head of a vast army, he conquered almost all of the Indian subcontinent.
- In 305, he concluded an alliance with Seleucus I—one of the successors of Alexander the Great and the founder of the Seleucid Empire—and in so doing brought to an end the attempts by the Greeks to control the region.
- Late in life, he sought refuge in the ascetic beliefs of Jainism, which teaches a path to spiritual purity through discipline. Then, in 298, at a time of great famine, Chandragupta finally handed over

power to his son Bindusara and withdrew to a cave where he is said to have meditated for five weeks—without food or drink—until he died of starvation.

- Chandragupta's successor, Bindusara, ruled for 25 years and was known as the "Slayer of Enemies"—owing to the fact that he brutally enforced his authority over the lands he consolidated into the Mauryan Empire. But today, Bindusara is thought of primarily as forming a generational bridge between grandfather and grandson.
- Ashoka was not particularly well placed to ascend to the throne. The Mauryan Dynasty was polygamous, and Ashoka had numerous brothers—perhaps dozens of them—added to which his mother was low in the pecking order of royal wives.
- However, even before Bindusara's death in 273 or 272, his council of ministers seems to have lost confidence in the ability of the king's eldest son, Susheema, to succeed him. During an uprising in Taxila, which threatened to cause the breakup of the Mauryan Empire, Susheema was first sent to quell the revolt and failed, and Ashoka replaced him and was welcomed by the people. The uprising came to an end. Susheema's authority was fatally undermined, and he was bypassed by the council that appointed the king.
- The Greco-Roman historians almost completely ignore Ashoka. Our only other source for his reign—in addition to the ancient inscribed edicts in Brahmi script—are Buddhist texts that were almost consigned to oblivion with the rise of Hinduism in India in the centuries after Ashoka, and that portray him as a monster of depravity before his "conversion" to Buddhist beliefs and the embodiment of piety and enlightenment afterward. All we know about Ashoka comes principally from these two sources, neither of which is entirely reliable.
- It takes Ashoka two years to establish himself securely on the throne. To consolidate his power, he may have killed at least one of his brothers. He is also said to subject his leading ministers to a test

of loyalty to see if they are trustworthy. Five hundred of them fail the test and are executed. It is claimed that he keeps a harem of 500 concubines, and he becomes so incensed by the treatment that he receives from them that on one occasion he has the entire lot burned to death.

- All of these claims derive from the Buddhist records of Ashoka's transformation from monster to redeemer. Yet the portrait of degeneracy is to some extent matched by at least one contemporaneous inscription that is etched in stone after the Battle of Kalinga—a document whose promulgation Ashoka himself authorizes.

### **The Attack on Kalinga**

- Eight years after coming to power, Ashoka finally feels sufficiently secure within his realm to undertake a foreign venture: an attack on Kalinga in central-eastern India. Kalinga is the only part of the Indian subcontinent that remains independent. It is not only fertile but also of great strategic importance, because it controls coastal trade routes connecting modern-day India to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Burma, as well as farther east to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.
- Gaining control of Kalinga has political, commercial, and dynastic significance for Ashoka. And it would give the young king the satisfaction of achieving one of his grandfather's unfulfilled ambitions. We have no account of the war that ensues, other than that it is preceded by a demand from Ashoka that the Kalingans submit. The Kalingans refuse, and Ashoka attacks.
- A very bloody battle unfolds. When it ends, about 200,000 lie dead and another 150,000 are “transported from there,” as one of the inscriptions tells us, although whether they are prisoners or deportees is unclear. Even though the number of casualties and captives is undoubtedly inflated, the motivation and scale of the atrocity would likely today be characterized as genocide.

- Following his victory, Ashoka is wandering in one of the cities of Kalinga, observing the effects of the war, when he is overcome with guilt because of the terrible carnage he has caused. Suddenly, everything he has believed in until this point of his life—gaining the throne, strengthening his grip on power, extending his empire—is a lie, and everything changes from this moment onward.
- Ashoka now embraces Buddhism more fervently. It's important to note that he already identified himself as a Buddhist two years prior to the battle at Kalinga—at least nominally—so it would not be fully accurate to say that he “converted.” Over time, Ashoka will reflect upon the war and promulgate his reflections on inscriptions throughout his kingdom.
- About 18 months after this life-altering experience at Kalinga, Ashoka becomes a zealot. He sets out on a tour of his kingdom lasting 256 days, during which he addresses audiences and distributes wealth, particularly to monks and the elderly. He also finances public works and sends missionaries to neighboring kingdoms, notably to Burma and Sri Lanka, as a result of which Buddhism spreads to these regions.
- Consistent with his Buddhist faith, Ashoka adopts the principle of *dhamma* as his moral code and promotes its practice among his people. *Dhamma* is a Sanskrit word that is almost impossible to translate but refers to duty, law, piety, and righteousness. It requires from those who practice it a commitment to nonviolence, social responsibility, and toleration.

### The End of Ashoka's Life

- The end of Ashoka's life is shrouded in mystery. The Buddhist literature suggests that he has to deal with intrigue by his courtiers and that revolts develop throughout his kingdom. It tells us that when he realizes he is dying, he becomes depressed.
- According to Buddhist tradition, Ashoka, at the end of his life, gives away everything he possesses until all he has left is half a

mango, which he offers to the monks who are looking after him. This story has Ashoka's life conform to a Buddhist convention: that he began life as an immoral, wicked man; that he later embraced Buddhism and became pious; and that, at the end, having given away all his possessions and divested himself of all his power, his life terminated as a failure in his own eyes.

- Ashoka died in his early 70s, in the year 232 B.C.E., after a reign that had lasted for nearly 40 years. The Mauryan Empire survived Ashoka's death for only half a century. His other great achievement—establishing a state based on Buddhist principles—was equally short lived. This is partly because the kings who succeeded Ashoka were extremely weak and partly because Hinduism was on the rise and Buddhism fell out of favor.
- In time, Ashoka's name disappeared from the historical memory. Buddhism was replaced by Hinduism after the 5<sup>th</sup> century C.E., and although the Hindus did not seek to obliterate all traces of Ashoka,



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**The circular symbol in the middle of India's national flag, called the Dharma Chakra, was associated with the emperor Ashoka.**

they were opposed to Buddhist teachings generally. Meanwhile, Ashoka's pillars and rocks had attained a state identity and authority that was useful to his successors, who carved their own political messages alongside—or in some cases over—the older edicts.

- In time, the old Prakrit script could no longer be read or understood, and even the name of Ashoka began to disappear from the public record. Then, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, European scholars began piecing together a historical interpretation of early India, based in part on written myths and legends that they believed to have been grounded in fact.
- It was a scanty record in comparison to Arabic and biblical writings, or the Chinese chronicles and Greco-Roman texts. However, in time, the myths and legends came to be supplemented by archaeological data that presented new clues. British colonial officials were among the first to identify broken artifacts and to piece them together and learn from them.
- The Edicts of Ashoka were unearthed during the early 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their recovery spots extend in an arc from Afghanistan in the northwest to Sri Lanka in the southeast. And although the edicts were defaced by the rulers who succeeded Ashoka—and who found them to be threatening—these inscriptions nevertheless reveal the flawed leader who exercised restraint just at the moment when he was mightiest and who subsequently, like Mahatma Gandhi, used persuasion rather than force to impose his will.
- In 1837, under the Company Raj—during the period when the British East India Company controlled India—a colonial administrator and scholar named James Prinsep finally deciphered the Brahmi script and established that the individual referred to as Piyadasi or Priyadarsi—“Beloved of the Gods”—was, in fact, Ashoka.

## Suggested Reading

Reat, *Buddhism*.

Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka*.

Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What is conversion? What personality traits are susceptible to it? What causes it?
2. Did Ashoka set an example in the conduct of international affairs that could ever be adopted again?

# Hannibal: Rome Holds Its Breath

## Lecture 10

**I**t's the night of August 2, 216 B.C.E., and a horseman has just arrived in Rome bearing news of the most disastrous military defeat that the city has suffered in its 500-year history. The battle has taken place in Apulia, in southeast Italy, about 300 miles south of Rome, just outside a town called Cannae. The victorious Carthaginian general Hannibal now offers, from afar, to ransom 8,000 prisoners—on the condition that the Romans agree to peace terms. The Roman Senate will decide this proposal. Outside the Senate House, thousands of Romans are gathered, knowing that if someone they love is being held in Hannibal's prison camp, their fate is about to be determined.

### Hannibal

- The Romans hate Hannibal; he is their worst nightmare. The Roman historian Livy charges Hannibal with a formidable list of crimes, including “inhuman cruelty, perfidy worse than that of an ordinary Carthaginian, disregard for truth and sanctity, lack of fear for the gods, contempt for the sanctity of an oath, and the absence of any religious scruples.”
- Even so, Livy by no means lacks in admiration for Hannibal. He describes him as energetic, able to withstand extremes of temperature, and moderate in his consumption of food and drink. Hannibal is said to endure the same privations as his men are subjected to.
- Hannibal is one of the most remarkable military leaders of all time. Until now, Hannibal's life has been characterized by unrelieved harshness, deprivation, and discomfort. He is a lateral thinker with a natural aptitude to think outside the box, as his application of unconventional military tactics reveals time and again. He is also a keen student of human nature who consistently seeks to familiarize himself with the personalities of his opponents and then exploit their weaknesses to bring about their ruin.





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The Carthaginian general Hannibal crossed the Alps with his army in 218 B.C.E.

- Cannae is the moment he has waited for all his life—ever since his father, Hamilcar Barca, made him take a solemn oath “that he, Hannibal, would never be a friend of the Romans.” Those words have come down to us from Nepos, Hannibal’s Roman biographer. Hamilcar allegedly made his son take the oath at the age of nine before he took him on a military campaign to Spain. Hannibal would never know anything else but army life until his later years.
- We don’t have any testimony from the Carthaginian side because the Carthaginians haven’t left us any writings. But it’s not improbable that Hannibal disseminated frightening reports of himself to create an image that would strike fear in the hearts of Romans.

### **The Battle of Cannae**

- At the time of this story, the Carthaginians and the Romans have been enemies for half a century, with the First Punic War breaking out in 264 B.C.E. and lasting until 241 and the Second Punic War beginning two years before the Battle of Cannae.
- Sometime between late April and mid-June of 218, Hannibal departs from Carthago Nova in Spain, modern-day Cartagena (which is the main Carthaginian city in Spain). He is heading toward modern-day Italy, determined to take the fight to the enemy.
- Hannibal heads a motley band of Africans, Spanish, Ligurians, Celts, Phoenicians, Italians, and Greeks. A later inscription states that Hannibal’s army consists of 90,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry. That is undoubtedly exaggerated but probably not wildly.
- Hannibal commands the largest and most experienced army in the Mediterranean. His plan is to destroy Rome, not by razing it to the ground but by isolating it from its allies in the Italian Peninsula—on whom Rome is dependent—because the allies contribute soldiers for the capital’s war effort.

- Hannibal crosses the Pyrenees, which separate modern-day Spain from France, in July or August of 218. He now has only 50,000 infantry and 9,000 cavalry left. The rest, many of them mercenaries, have abandoned him. The worst is yet to come, however.
- He makes rapid progress along the French coast, facing little opposition from the local tribes. He crosses the River Rhône in September and reaches the foothills of the Alps probably in late October. Finally, he is about to undertake the most amazing part of his journey.
- But first his army is attacked by a hostile people called the Allobroges, who left Hannibal's army in such wretched plight that one of his lieutenants recommended cannibalism, which he rejects. The descent is as difficult as the ascent. Hannibal's army is now reduced further to 12,000 African infantry, 8,000 Iberian infantry, and 6,000 cavalry—less than half the number he'd had after crossing the Pyrenees.
- Despite his losses, Hannibal still has a highly effective fighting force. He proceeds to defeat the Romans at the River Ticinus in late November and at the River Trebbia in late December—both in northern Italy. Then, on June 21, 217, he ambushes a Roman army at Lake Trasimene and defeats it crushingly.
- After this latest debacle, the Roman Senate appoints Quintus Fabius Maximus as dictator. And Fabius makes it his policy to avoid a head-on confrontation. Fabius's term of office as dictator lapses in December of 217, and the military command of the Roman army is given to two consuls with equal authority: Gaius Terentius Varro and Lucius Aemilius Paullus.
- The two consuls join forces at the end of July 216 and pursue the Carthaginian general south, intent on forcing a final showdown. Hannibal is actually luring the Romans to Cannae, located on the south bank of the Aufidius River, modern-day Ofanto. Cannae is

of considerable significance to the Romans. The Aufidius is the only major river in central Italy. The town controls access to the rich grain fields in the south, so it's an important supply base for the Romans.

- Hannibal's forces are outnumbered by more than two to one. Over the past six months, Rome has been making a supreme effort to increase its fighting strength. In fact, it has doubled the size of its army—from 20,000 to 40,000. And the total number of Rome's army is twice that. An equal number of soldiers have been conscripted from other cities on the Italian Peninsula that are allied to Rome and required to furnish troops.
- But Hannibal knows that half of these troops are completely untested in battle and capable of only limited military maneuvers. He strongly suspects that the Romans expect to rely on sheer weight to crush him. In turn, Hannibal intends to win through superior tactics.
- He also carefully studies the temperaments of the two enemy Roman consuls—Varro and Paullus—who, according to traditional military procedure, command the joint army on alternate days when two consular armies join forces.
- Varro is much more eager to engage the invading enemy than Paullus is, and he is likely to be more reckless. For this reason, Hannibal decides to lure the Romans into battle on a day when Varro is in command.
- On August 2, Varro leads his men out of camp with the intention of offering battle. While Hannibal's infantry is outnumbered by the Romans, his cavalry greatly outnumbers the enemy—about 10,000 to Rome's 6,000—and it's far superior in discipline and expertise.
- Livy's description of the battle is lurid and, indeed, moving. He reports that some injured Romans bury their heads in the ground in a pathetic effort to choke themselves to death. Nearly 20,000

men are taken prisoner. Only 14,500 escape death or captivity. The moment is all the more delicious for Hannibal because it represents payback for his father, for himself, and for Carthage's defeat in the First Punic War.

- The Roman consul Aemilius Paullus—who a day before argued with his consular colleague Varro against confronting Hannibal in battle—is among the fallen. Hannibal gives him an honorable burial, while leaving the rest of the enemy dead on the field to rot.
- Hannibal has won an outstanding victory—one of the greatest of all time—and it will be an inspiration for military strategists up to the present day.

### **After the Battle**

- Despite the victory against great odds, Cannae comes at considerable cost to the winner. Hannibal's losses amount to 6,000 men—15 percent of his forces—of whom 2,000 followed him all the way from Spain. The rest are recruits acquired along the way, most of them Gauls who attached themselves to Hannibal's banner in the hope of acquiring rich rewards.
- Immediately after the battle, the surviving consul Varro dispatches a messenger on horseback to Rome. Traveling at breakneck speed, he reaches the capital in less than 12 hours. An emergency meeting of the Senate is called. The city is in turmoil. There is a sense of overwhelming despair.
- Ten prisoners are sent by Hannibal and arrive under the command of Carthaginian cavalry officer named Carthalo. They bring the offer to ransom 8,000 captives and negotiate peace terms. As soon as the Senate learns that Carthalo is outside Rome, it orders him to depart. But it allows the Roman prisoners to deliver Hannibal's message.
- The decision regarding whether to ransom the 8,000 Romans must be made quickly. The Carthaginian army will undoubtedly arrive

in a few days. On the advice of a senator named Titus Manlius Torquatus, the senators vote not to ransom a single Roman prisoner. Instead, the 10 prisoners who came with Hannibal's offer are sent back to Hannibal—and to possible death. This is a truly momentous and courageous decision, because, as Livy says, "most of the senators had relatives among the captives."

- With every minute that passes, the Roman senators hold their breath, expecting to see Hannibal on the horizon and fearing the worst. The consul Varro soon returns to Rome to make his own report to the Senate. Livy tells us that a large crowd greets him and congratulates him "for not having despaired of the Republic"—for having the courage to accept the unpleasant results rather than go into voluntary exile.
- Hannibal impatiently awaits the response of the Romans, who in turn are holding their breath, fearfully awaiting his next move. This is, undoubtedly, Hannibal's finest hour. Rome is on the ropes, and thanks to his great victory, Carthage will soon reclaim its rightful position as master of the Mediterranean—or so Hannibal believes.
- When Carthalo returns to the Carthaginian camp with the news that the Romans aren't prepared to negotiate, Hannibal is taken by surprise. He wastes no time in executing a number of prisoners, presumably the most eminent, and sells the rest into slavery.
- Although he does not know it, Hannibal's finest hour is quickly receding, notwithstanding the fact that his victory will make Carthage—for a few brief years—the most powerful state in the Mediterranean. Some in Hannibal's army must urge him to take Rome. Hannibal declines.
- Still, Rome holds its breath. And the question as to why Hannibal fails to consolidate the victory at Cannae—by launching an immediate attack on Rome—has exercised military pundits as well as armchair historians ever since.

- There are a number of reasons why he might have decided that it wasn't a particularly brilliant idea. One is that he lacks the forces to conduct a protracted siege. Siege warfare in the ancient world is long and painstaking, sometimes taking years. There is the likelihood, too, that his army will become restive. Most of his men have joined up for easy profits and aren't the least bit interested in Rome's fate. They'd rather pillage the countryside than besiege a city.
- Hannibal is eventually driven out of Italy and defeated on home ground by Publius Scipio at Zama in 202. Scipio is later accorded the honorific title "Africanus." The Romans, due to their decision not to come to terms with Hannibal, will later proclaim themselves to be a people who never give in.

### Suggested Reading

Garland, *Hannibal*.

O'Connell, *The Ghosts of Cannae*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How might the world be different if Hannibal had subjugated Rome?
2. What factors led to Hannibal's eventual defeat?

# The Final Days of Julius Caesar

## Lecture 11

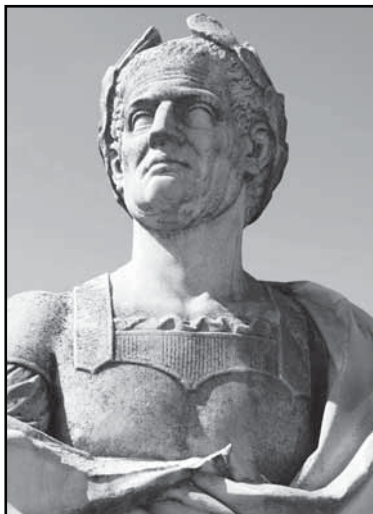
It's October of 45 B.C.E. in Rome. The great general Gaius Julius Caesar is riding in a chariot drawn by four white horses. The streets of Rome are packed with cheering crowds. As Caesar approaches the Temple of Fortuna—on the route to the Roman Forum—the axle of the great chariot he stands in suddenly snaps, unceremoniously pitching both him and his slave out of the cart. This is a bad omen, all the more so because Fortuna, the goddess of good luck, has favored the general so many times in his extraordinarily successful career. Has Fortuna finally deserted him?

### Julius Caesar

- Julius Caesar has reached the pinnacle of his career. But, physically, he's in decline. He's in his mid-50s—which is old for anyone in the ancient world—and his health is failing. Even so, the great general is also enormously charismatic, and he's gifted beyond any of his contemporaries.
- Caesar is intensely aggressive, highly competitive, and excessively vain. He's conquered Gaul and invaded Britain. Yet he's so vain that the honor he appreciates most is the right to wear a gold crown in public. Alongside the vanity, Caesar has a giant-size ego. To his credit, he's possessed of a subtle and penetrating intellect. And he has an unrivaled flare for politics.
- Caesar stands for no cause other than his own. And he's now *dictator perpetuo*—dictator for life—a position that no one in Rome has ever held before. It means that he can do pretty much whatever he likes, without any opposition from the Senate. But to understand how he got to this point, we need to step back about 15 years to when Caesar and Gnaeus Pompeius Maximus—Pompey the Great—were the two most powerful men in the Roman world.



- In the beginning, Caesar and Pompey were best friends. Caesar was the junior partner with Pompey (a highly successful general) and Marcus Licinius Crassus (a wealthy financier) in a political arrangement called the First Triumvirate, or “Rule of Three Men.”
- Early on, Pompey wanted the Senate to ratify a political settlement that he made after a victorious campaign out in the East. Part of Pompey’s request was for his army veterans to be given land to retire on. The tax collectors who worked for Crassus owed a huge sum in back taxes to the Roman exchequer, and for his part, Crassus wanted forgiven one-third of what they owed.



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**Julius Caesar, who was the dictator of Rome from 46 to 44 B.C.E., was famously assassinated by conspirators on the Ides of March.**

- Both men wanted something, and they agreed to bring in Caesar to force the measures through the Senate because he had already demonstrated that he was a highly skilled politician. In return, Pompey and Crassus promised to get Caesar appointed as proconsul in charge of the plum province of Transalpine Gaul, which is roughly modern-day France and Belgium. Pompey married Caesar’s daughter Julia to solidify the relationship.
- Everything went swimmingly for a while. But in 55 B.C.E., Crassus was killed while fighting in Syria. And the year following, Julia died in childbirth. From this point onward, Caesar and Pompey increasingly came to see each other as rivals.

- The crunch came in January 49 B.C.E., when Caesar was on the point of returning to Rome after eight years of successful campaigning in Gaul, where he pacified the entire province—an astounding achievement.
- Caesar now proposed that both he and Pompey should disband their armies. And he threatened to initiate a civil war if Pompey failed to comply. Pompey refused, whereupon Caesar took the fateful step of crossing the Rubicon—a small river in the northeast of Italy—and from there marching on Rome.
- By law, Roman generals were required to detach themselves from their armies at the Rubicon and not march south from there. It was now—as he crossed the river—that Caesar uttered the famous words: “*Alea iacta est*”—“The die is cast.” It is one of the great turning points in Roman history.
- Had Caesar separated himself from his army, as the law required, he would have been prosecuted for various illegalities, and his political career would have ended. Almost certainly, he would have been exiled. But this immense gamble paid off handsomely.
- Barely 18 months later—in August 48—Caesar inflicted a catastrophic defeat on Pompey at Pharsalus in central Greece. Pompey then fled to Egypt, where he was murdered upon arrival. Although Pompey had been eliminated, his sons fought on. It wouldn’t be until three years later, on March 17, 45 B.C.E., that Caesar finally defeated them at Munda in southern Spain.

### The Gallic Triumph

- The civil war was bloody and divisive. Having produced the deaths of tens of thousands of Romans, the conflict also created a huge image problem for Caesar. He doesn’t want this to be his legacy, so he comes up with the idea of representing his victories over his enemies as Rome’s victories over Rome’s enemies.

- Pompey had once celebrated a triple triumph—three celebrations in a row. So, Caesar decides to celebrate a quadruple triumph. The first of the four triumphs will be held in celebration of his victory in Transalpine Gaul, which, thanks to Caesar, is now part of the Roman Empire.
- Today, the Gallic triumph—the first of the four—is being celebrated. The festivities will be spread out over 10 days. It's the most spectacular public event ever staged in Rome. At the end, a huge public banquet will be held with 22,000 tables laid out in the Campus Martius—the Field of Mars—on the west side of the city. Hundreds, if not thousands, of prisoners of war will then fight to the death in the Forum for the delectation of the crowd.
- The procession, with Caesar and his chariot at its center, has assembled at the Campus Martius. The procession passes through the Triumphal Gate—which formally marks the entrance into Rome from the Campus Martius—and from there approaches the Temple of Fortuna (close to the River Tiber), where the axle of Caesar's chariot snaps. Then, the procession moves on to the Circus Maximus, which is a vast arena that accommodates perhaps about a quarter of a million people and which is where chariot races are normally held.
- Behind the general, his soldiers chant in ritual unison, "*Io triumphe! Io triumphe!*": "Hurrah for the triumph!" They also sing ribald songs about Caesar's sexual exploits. A long line of Gallic prisoners slouches along dejectedly, in chains. The triumphal procession eventually winds its way along the Sacred Way into the Forum and then up onto the Capitoline Hill.
- The day culminates in a sacrifice outside the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. This is an occasion to celebrate not only the greatest general, but also Rome itself. Rome is the center of the universe, and its military might is far greater than any power on Earth can possibly match.

## The Murder of Julius Caesar

- March 15, 44 B.C.E.—the Ides of March—is the most ill-fated day in the Roman calendar. The past four or five months have not been easy ones for Caesar. He's been irritable and bad tempered. He's made it abundantly clear that he utterly despises the Senate, and as a result, he has become politically isolated. Even before his triumphs, he alienated a great number of people on his way to power. And now he seems to have grown completely indifferent to public opinion.
- In consequence, a murder conspiracy has formed against him, probably dating to the month prior. It is one of the largest murder plots in history. Around 80 men have joined. The ringleaders are Gaius Cassius Longinus and Marcus Junius Brutus, both of whom fought alongside Pompey in the civil war and were pardoned by Caesar.
- The dictator will spend the last evening of his life in the company of his Master of Horses, or second in command, Marcus Lepidus. Caesar next returns home to the *domus publica*—his house in the Forum—and to his wife, Calpurnia. Just as with the chariot's broken axle, a series of ominous signs appear during the night. Calpurnia has a nightmare in which she is cradling Caesar's bleeding body. And she does all she can to prevent him from attending to his duty of appearing in the Senate the next morning.
- The Senate meets at around 6 a.m., and three hours pass with no sign of Caesar. Growing restless, the conspirators send Senator Decimus Brutus to find out what's going on. Decimus arrives at Caesar's house around 10 a.m. and—over Calpurnia's protests—persuades Caesar to attend the Senate by revealing to him that he will be honored with yet another title: king.
- Caesar decides to go to the Senate after all; perhaps he even knows about the plot and in the end disdains to show fear. He arrives at the Senate House around noon. He has now kept the senators waiting five or six hours. As he is about to enter the Senate, someone hands

him a scroll revealing details of the plot (but which he leaves unread). A moment later, Caesar catches sight of a seer named Spurinna, who warned him some weeks ago to beware the Ides of March.

- A senator named Gaius Trebonius steps in front of Mark Antony—Caesar’s consular colleague and close friend—and engages Antony in a lively conversation, thereby preventing him from entering. Inside, the house is packed. Many senators are recent nominees of Caesar taking their place for the first time.
- A hush falls as Caesar takes his seat. Then, swiftly, several conspirators rise from their benches, obstructing the dictator from the view of the rest. One of them, named Tillius Cimber, falls to his knees in feigned supplication and requests that his brother be allowed to return from exile. When Caesar tells Cimber that he is out of order, the man grabs hold of Caesar’s toga so that he cannot defend himself.
- In the mob attack that follows, Cassius slashes Caesar in the face with a dagger, while another senator, Bucolianus, strikes him in the back. When Marcus Brutus—whom Caesar has trusted completely—comes forward and plunges his dagger into him, Caesar says, “*Kai su, teknon?*”—“And you, my child?” in Greek. There was a rumor that Brutus was Caesar’s son, so these last words, if true, have particular poignancy.
- It is at this moment that Caesar gives up resisting. The conspirators keep hacking at his prostrate body, wounding him 23 times, according to one authority, and 35 times, according to another. As Caesar goes down, he draws his toga over his head to cover his face so that his assassins will not witness his death agony. Mark Antony, hearing the screams and fearing for his life, escapes.

## Caesar's Funeral

- Caesar's funeral takes place a few days later, on or around March 20. The consul Mark Antony delivers a eulogy over the dead. We don't have a record of what Mark Antony actually says. It may be a rather conventional eulogy. But it inflames the Roman populace. Antony works on the crowd to the point where they demand that he read Caesar's will.
- Plutarch tells us that "when it was revealed that Caesar had left 75 denarii to every citizen, and had also bequeathed his gardens on the far side of the River Tiber to them, an immense wave of goodwill and love rolled over them." Seventy-five denarii would have been sufficient for a family to live on for a month or two—in other words, it was a considerable sum.
- At this moment, a surging mass of mourners takes possession of Caesar's corpse and hoists it on their shoulders. The mob parades around the Forum with the dictator's body held high. Roman soldiers lining the route struggle to keep the crowd in check. Then, a cry goes up that Caesar should be cremated in the Forum, rather than in the Field of Mars—as he had requested in his will—because Caesar is the second founder of Rome.
- The idea gathers momentum, and people begin building a giant pyre in the Forum, piling on everything they can lay their hands on, including benches and personal possessions. Then, the crowd heaps Caesar's mangled body on top of the pyre. The pyre will burn for several days as people keep throwing new objects on the blaze. Some keep vigil. And Caesar is still honored in Rome to this day.

### Suggested Reading

Garland, *Julius Caesar*.

Goldsworthy, *Caesar*.

## Questions to Consider

1. To what extent did the goddess Fortuna determine the course of Caesar's career?
2. In what ways did Antony's reading of Caesar's will change the course of history?

# Antony and Cleopatra's Death Pact

## Lecture 12

It's the afternoon of September 2, 31 B.C.E. We're at Actium, a sandy promontory in the Ambracian Gulf in northwest Greece. A naval battle is about to be fought that will determine the future of the Roman Empire. On one side is Mark Antony, in command of the eastern half of the empire and allied to Cleopatra—the queen of Egypt and a former mistress of Julius Caesar. On the other side is Octavian, who commands the empire's western half. How is it that the fate of Rome is about to be determined off the coast of Greece?

### Antony

- A few weeks after Caesar's funeral, it was discovered that Caesar had left an adopted son and heir—Gaius Octavius—whom he'd adopted seven months before his death. Octavian, as historians call him, was the grandson of Caesar's sister Julia. He was a sickly 18-year-old with no appetite for war but with a ruthless instinct for self-preservation and an insatiable lust for power. Octavian was destined to become the future emperor Augustus. But no one could have predicted that in 44 B.C.E.
- Mark Antony was himself an astute, tested warrior and politician. And still, like everyone else, he completely underestimated Octavian. Caesar's grand-nephew capitalized on his adoption by assuming the title of *divi filius*—meaning “son of the god”—and initially struck a deal to join forces with Antony in taking revenge on Caesar's assassins.
- Together, they defeated the leading conspirators—Brutus and Cassius—at the Battle of Philippi in Macedonia in 42 B.C.E. Actually, Octavian wasn't feeling too well that day and probably spent most of the battle in his tent. Later, as relations between the two cooled, they sought to strengthen their bond by formalizing their *amicitia*, or political friendship, by having Mark Antony marry Octavian's sister, Octavia.



- But the arrangement collapsed because Antony became infatuated with Cleopatra. He moved to Alexandria—the capital of Egypt—and began a very public relationship with the Egyptian queen. Octavian interpreted Antony's choice as a humiliation, both of himself and of his sister.

- In 31 B.C.E., in the Ambracian Gulf, which is off northwestern Greece, Octavian is moving into position to block Mark Antony from gaining access to Italy and thereby taking control of the entire empire. As Octavian reinforces his seaward flanks to keep the enemy from racing around him on either side, Antony suddenly attacks the middle and breaks through, followed by Cleopatra's ships bearing the treasury.



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- But at this moment, Cleopatra, whether through cunning or panic, signals for her ships to flee. As he watches his lover and naval ally speed out of sight, should Mark Antony put his political ambitions and the interests of his men first, or should his love for this Egyptian queen take priority? Antony's decision—made as Octavian is bearing down on him—will determine Rome's future.

**Cleopatra jointly ruled Egypt with her brother Ptolemy XIII, who also was her husband, until she defeated him in battle.**

## Cleopatra

- Cleopatra VII is the last of the Ptolemaic ruling house, named for its founder, Ptolemy, who ruled Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.E. The Ptolemies are Macedonian Greeks, and Ptolemy himself was one of Alexander's generals.

- In 51 B.C.E., Cleopatra, at the age of 18, had become joint ruler of Egypt with her younger brother Ptolemy XIII. Ptolemy XIII was also her husband, in accordance with the Egyptian practice of brother-sister marriage among royalty. When the pair fell out and declared war against each other, Cleopatra secured a powerful sponsor and lover in Julius Caesar.
- With Caesar's military assistance, she defeated her brother-husband, who was drowned in the Nile (apparently while fleeing). Shortly afterward, Cleopatra gave birth to a son, Ptolemy Caesar, whom she nicknamed Caesarion—meaning “Little Caesar”—thereby proclaiming her liaison with the most powerful man in the world.
- Accompanied by this son, Cleopatra was in Rome in 44 B.C.E. when Julius Caesar was murdered. When the news of the assassination reached her, she probably feared for her life. She made it back to Egypt without mishap and, before long, sought to ally herself with power once again.
- Three years later—in 41 B.C.E.—Mark Antony summoned Cleopatra to Tarsus, in modern-day southern Turkey, to account for why she had provided only lukewarm support in his war against Caesar's assassins. Cleopatra seized the opportunity. The political gains for the queen are enormous.
- Cleopatra succeeds in extricating herself from a dangerous situation by persuading Antony that her own henchman, Serapion, had acted contrary to her interests in aiding one of Caesar's assassins—Cassius—and in arguing that she herself is entirely innocent. Antony seems to have accepted her excuse.
- There must be a very special chemistry between Cleopatra and Antony. Antony may well be in love with her. Even so, the liaison is to have fatal consequences, because not only does it alienate Antony from Octavian, but it also provides Caesar's heir with powerful ammunition for his propaganda machine.

- Octavian depicts Antony as Cleopatra's puppet, who has abandoned his duty to the Roman state. Cleopatra for her part is depicted in Rome as an oriental sorceress who has used dark powers to seduce Antony. Octavian's objective is to make Romans fear and detest the pair, and he succeeds brilliantly.

## The Death of Antony

- Antony—either because he genuinely thinks his cause is lost or because he can't bear to be separated from Cleopatra—finds a gap in the enemy fleet ranged against him and races after her. In the split second it takes him to make up his mind, the Roman world passes from his hands into Octavian's. His fleet will be destroyed, and soon afterward, his army will be forced to surrender.
- After the escape at Actium, Antony turns his back on public business and indulges in a life of endless partying, in thrall to his harlot queen, according to the Greek historian Plutarch. Cleopatra, for her part, becomes interested in poisons, with which she experiments on men who have been condemned to death, in order to analyze the effects of the toxins.
- Nearly a year passes before Octavian's war fleet arrives in Alexandria. By now, he has succeeded in undermining Antony and Cleopatra's support even in Egypt, their safe haven. Nevertheless, Antony is determined to fight. He is not as enfeebled as Octavian depicts him. Antony prepares for one last military engagement.
- On the evening of July 31, 30 B.C.E., Antony and Cleopatra host their final banquet. Ancient writers endow the couple's last evening with an eerie, almost unearthly quality. We're told that the pair describe themselves as the *sunapothoumenoi*—"those who die together"—in the full knowledge that their doom is at hand.
- The next morning, Antony bids Cleopatra goodbye and departs to review his forces. He probably senses that his men are uneasy and lacking in confidence. His efforts to rally them fall on deaf ears.

And once he engages Octavian, most of his fleet and cavalry desert to the enemy, calculating that the day is lost even before hostilities begin. Only his infantry attempts a halfhearted resistance before melting away.

- Learning of Antony's defeat, Cleopatra walls herself inside the family mausoleum. When she receives a false report that Antony has been killed in battle, the queen prepares to take her own life. Some historians believe that Cleopatra spreads the rumor of her suicide to persuade Antony to take his own life.
- According to an account delivered by Cleopatra's personal physician, Olympus, the defeated Antony returns to the palace and searches desperately for Cleopatra, only to be informed that she has retired to the family mausoleum to commit suicide. Antony now asks his slave, Eros, to run a sword through him. But Eros takes his own life instead.
- Antony then drives his sword into his own stomach, and botches the attempt, whereupon he learns that Cleopatra is still alive. In great agony, Antony orders that he be conveyed to the mausoleum to join her. His body is raised up to the mausoleum by means of ropes and pulleys. Once inside, Antony does his best to console his grief-stricken lover and asks her to remember their happy times together, and then he dies in her arms.

### **The Death of Cleopatra**

- Octavian, who is now the uncontested leader of Rome, hopes to transport Cleopatra back home in order to parade her in triumph. Meanwhile, Octavian's officer Proculeius arrives in Alexandria—in advance of the Roman army—and races to the mausoleum, where the Egyptian queen is hiding. As his men burst into the tomb, Cleopatra attempts to stab herself with a dagger, but the weapon is wrested from her hands.

- The queen—appearing to be chastened and compliant—then requests permission to embalm Antony’s body before burying it in the mausoleum. Cleopatra’s request is granted. In the meantime, she is placed under house arrest.
- Octavian himself now enters Alexandria, taking care to surround himself with a bodyguard because he is wary of the local population. But he announces that he will spare the city and its people. This is an act of exceptional magnanimity, because it is customary in antiquity for a victorious general to enslave the women and children and massacre the males.
- Cleopatra spends her final days in the mausoleum bent over the body of Mark Antony, according to her physician Olympus. She is distraught. She falls into a fever that lasts for days and refuses to take either food or drink.
- On August 8, a week after Antony’s defeat, Cleopatra at last receives a visit from Octavian. When he enters the mausoleum, she prostrates herself before him and, according to the report, even tries to seduce him. Highly improbable though it is that Cleopatra would summon her seductive wiles one last time, it is not unlikely that the deposed queen and the future first emperor do meet briefly before Octavian leaves Egypt for Syria three days later.
- Cleopatra learns from one of her spies that Octavian plans to send her and her children to Rome as soon as he departs from Egypt. That gives her three days in which to act—to take her life. The most celebrated account we have is of Cleopatra dying of a snakebite. This is the version that Octavian promulgates in a tableau that he will display in his triumphal procession three years later, in 27 B.C.E.
- The problem with this theory, however, is that it’s highly unlikely that a snake would have enough venom to kill Cleopatra and her two female servants, and we’re told that all three die together.

The historian Dio hypothesizes that a needle is used to administer the poison and that the marks on her body come from pinpricks, not bites.

- Cleopatra dies on August 10, 30 B.C.E. She is 39 years old and had ruled Egypt for more than two decades. Titular authority as ruler of Egypt now passes to Caesarion—Cleopatra's 17-year-old son—who becomes, in theory, Ptolemy XV. He is never crowned, however, and his reign lasted for only 18 days.
- While attempting to escape to Nubia in Upper Egypt, along with a sizeable chunk of his mother's treasure, Caesarion is betrayed by his tutor, who persuades him to return to Alexandria, ostensibly to be crowned king. Instead, he is murdered.
- With the deaths of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Octavian now becomes the undisputed ruler of the Roman world—the most powerful man on the planet. Three years later, in 27 B.C.E., he restores the Republic, which had been suspended under a system of government known as the Second Triumvirate, or “Rule by Three Men”—the three men being Octavian, Mark Antony, and a man named Marcus Lepidus, who died previously.
- The new system of government Octavian establishes becomes known as the Principate—effectively, rule by one man. The Principate will endure for more than 400 years. Octavian further burnishes his image as head of state by taking the name Augustus, meaning something akin to “Venerable One.” However, unlike Caesar, he scrupulously avoids any suggestion that he aspires to kingship.
- Egypt becomes a Roman province and a source of great enrichment to Augustus and his imperial successors. Had the Battle of Actium turned out differently—had Cleopatra not ordered her fleet to turn tail and had Antony not given orders to follow—Antony might well have tilted the Roman world to the East, making Western civilization become subservient to the Orient.

## Suggested Reading

Brown, *The Murder of Cleopatra*.

Burstein, *The Reign of Cleopatra*.

Fletcher, *Cleopatra the Great*.

Garland, *Celebrity in Antiquity*.

Roller, *Cleopatra*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Identify all the reasons why Octavian was able to overcome Mark Antony.
2. What would have been the consequences for Western civilization if Mark Antony had won the Battle of Actium?

# Jesus under Surveillance and Arrest

## Lecture 13

**T**he year is about 30 C.E. We are in the province of Judea. Although it is small, this territory is seething with dissent, both political and religious. Many of the troublemakers claim to be the Messiah, or the Anointed One; in fact, some even claim to be descended from King David, the first Jewish king. That's disturbing to the Romans, because anyone who sees himself as a king represents a challenge to the authority of the emperor. One such Anointed One has just arrived in Jerusalem. His name is Jesus of Nazareth, and he's accompanied by a large band of followers.

### Jesus in Jerusalem

- In Judea, we are visiting the holy city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is tense at this time because it happens to be Passover—or Pesach—the festival that celebrates the liberation of the Jewish people from captivity in Egypt more than a thousand years earlier. Passover isn't only a religious observance of high solemnity; it also functions as an expression of Jewish identity and self-determination.
- Given the underlying discontent in the region, the festival could easily develop into a focus of resistance to Roman rule. The prefect, Pontius Pilate, has canceled leave for his men and requested extra troops from the neighboring province of Syria.
- Tens of thousands of Jewish worshipers are in Jerusalem to attend services at the Great Temple, the chief synagogue, an architectural wonder that has only recently been completed. The holy city is filled to bursting, as it always is at this time of year.
- The Roman guards are patrolling the roof of the Temple for signs of disorder or, worse, insurrection. One potential troublemaker the Romans have their eye on is a carpenter's son from Nazareth named Jesus, who has been stirring things up in Galilee, an unruly region



in the north. Jesus of Nazareth has antagonized many of his own people and provoked some powerful enemies.

- One influential group he's antagonized are the Pharisees, who closely interpret what the Torah means in terms of how one should live. The word "Torah" refers to the first five books of the Bible ascribed to Moses. It's a Hebrew term that means the "Law of God." The Torah contains more than 600 rules that are intended to enable the Jewish people to live under God's law, and the Pharisees insist on following them to the letter.
- The principal reason why the Pharisees have gotten on Jesus's case is because of his failure to observe the Sabbath. The Fourth Commandment admonishes: "Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy." The Pharisees interpret this as meaning that no Jew should work on the Sabbath. Jesus, however—who appears to be a kind of faith healer—is going around curing people seven days a week. He's also claiming to possess some sort of divine authority to forgive sins. This is sacrilege in the eyes of the Pharisees and, indeed, in the eyes of all law-abiding Jews.
- Jesus has attracted a large number of devotees who follow him about wherever he goes and who hang on his every word. Many of them are women, which is highly suspicious. And it's difficult to know what his objective is. He has managed to avoid incriminating himself by saying anything that would suggest he poses a threat to Roman rule. But the Pharisees view him as presenting a serious challenge not only to their orthodox view of Judaism but also to their right to interpret the Torah.
- The moment Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, just a day or two ago, it was as if he went out of his way to get himself arrested by the Jewish high priesthood. The first thing he did was march into the Temple precinct and head for the money changers. Without warning, he overturned their tables and threw them out of the precinct. He also knocked over the stools where the people who sell doves were

sitting. The money changers and the sellers of doves are permitted to be in the Temple precinct by rabbinic law.

- In other words, Jesus not only disrupts the way that Temple taxes are collected but also interferes with the traditional means of sacrifice among the poor. That's how the Sadducees view the matter. They're another influential Jewish sect, one that has responsibility in the running of the Temple. They are up in arms about Jesus, too. Jesus is making many Jews upset. In fact, he's also going around saying that the Temple is going to be destroyed.
- The Romans aren't interested in getting involved in disputes among the Jews, and they're not particularly concerned about Jesus. Unless he does something to challenge Rome's authority, they don't see him as a serious threat. And the policing of the Temple comes under the responsibility of the officers of the Temple—that is, the Jewish police—not the Romans.
- Paula Fredriksen, a leading historian of early Christianity, suggests that Jesus's prophecy that the Temple is going to be destroyed may well have been written after the Temple was brought down in 70 C.E. after the failure of the Great Jewish Revolt. But that does not mean that we should reject the Gospel picture of Jesus as a troublemaker—and a rather violent one at that—when he comes to Jerusalem at Passover. It's precisely because this picture of Jesus as a troublemaker does not conform to the conventional image of him as a nonviolent, peaceful spiritual leader that it is likely to reflect the truth.

### The Arrest and Trial of Jesus

- It is these precipitating incidents at the Temple that lead to Jesus's arrest. The move against him is made at night because Jesus's enemies and detractors fear how his disciples might respond when they are gathered around him during the daytime. On the orders of the Jewish high priest Caiaphas, the lower-ranking priests and elders and officers of the Temple track Jesus down to a hill outside the walls of Jerusalem.

- But when the officers move in to make the arrest, violence erupts. One of Jesus's disciples attacks the servant of the chief priest. The other disciples quickly realize that they can't put up an effective resistance, and they disappear into the night.
- The officers of the Temple seize Jesus and deliver him to the high priest's house. What follows next is the most famous trial in history. The proceedings that follow consist of two parts: first Jewish, and then Roman. Jesus is first brought before the Jewish Council, known as the Sanhedrin, which possesses more power than is generally permitted to Roman provincial local courts.
- The Romans aren't insensitive to Jewish custom, so they permit the Sanhedrin to act independently of imperial authority—up to a point. They don't allow the council to authorize an execution. The author of Saint John's Gospel tells us that the Roman prefect reserves this power for himself.
- The Sanhedrin doesn't charge Jesus with any specific crime. It simply asks him some leading questions. Saint Luke's Gospel gives the fullest account of the investigation. The first question asked is, "Are you *Christos*, Christ, the Anointed One?"
- Jesus is careful not to incriminate himself. He replies, "If I tell you, you won't believe me." But then Jesus says something that really stirs things up: "From now onwards," he declares, "the Son of Man is going to be seated at the right hand of the power of God."
- The phrase "Son of Man" is one that Jesus has used to describe himself whenever anyone asks him, "Who are you?" It clearly means that he thinks he's someone special. And when he says it in the presence of the Sanhedrin, it causes uproar. People cry out: "Are you the son of God?" Once again, Jesus avoids giving a straightforward answer. He merely shoves the question back at his interrogators by stating, "You say that I am."

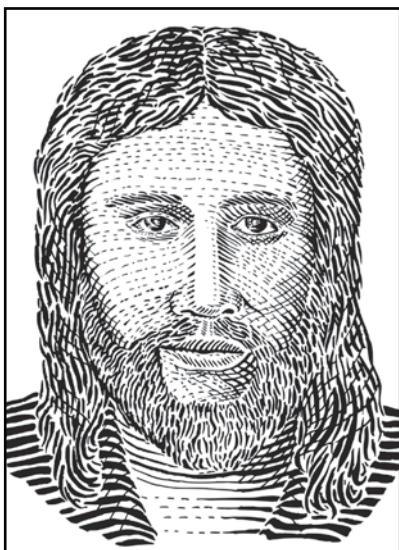
- In Saint Mark's Gospel, Jesus is additionally charged with threatening to destroy the Temple, although that may have been inserted into the historical account later to credit Jesus with a prophecy.
- Everybody now agrees—the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes—that the prisoner has convicted himself. It's important to point out that he hasn't actually been convicted of anything. But Jesus has revealed himself as a dangerous malcontent with a cult following who represents a challenge to traditional Jewish thinking and practice and who quite possibly thinks of himself as the Messiah. At this point, Caiaphas tears his garment, a symbolic act to indicate that he finds Jesus guilty.
- The Sanhedrin, assisted by some guards and accompanied by a noisy and irate crowd, now hauls Jesus off to the residence of the Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate, who became prefect in 26 C.E. and will remain in office until 36. Once the unruly, belligerent group arrives at Pilate's residence, the members of the Sanhedrin accuse Jesus of "perverting" the Jewish nation—of urging the Jews not to pay taxes to the emperor and of being a dangerous insurgent who claims to be the king of the Jews.
- They rightly calculate that this last charge will particularly rile Pilate because the Romans hate kings. Pilate asks Jesus just one question: "Are you the king of the Jews?" And again Jesus equivocates. "You say that I am," he replies.
- Pilate isn't convinced of his guilt or of the risk that he poses. Jesus is much like any other self-professed Messiah to him. At this point, it's likely that the high priest Caiaphas—with whom Pilate has collaborated for many years—works on the Roman prefect to make him anxious.
- Pilate is still reluctant to punish Jesus, however, according to the author of Luke, and makes one last effort to pass the buck. He learns that Jesus is a Galilean, which means that technically his crime—if

he has committed any—falls under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. The title “tetrarch” indicates that Herod Antipas has some authority in Galilee independent of Rome and probably includes the authority to order an execution.

- The chief priests and the Sanhedrin and the scribes—and the mob—now head off with the prisoner to the house in Jerusalem where Herod is staying for Passover. Herod has heard of Jesus, and when he’s brought

before him, he’s hoping that Jesus will produce some sort of sign. Jesus doesn’t produce any signs, and although Herod questions him at length, Jesus remains silent. In the end, Herod Antipas and his soldiers content themselves with ridiculing Jesus before sending him back to Pilate.

- Pilate now summons the high priests and the people to declare that neither he nor Herod have found substance to any of the charges that have been brought against Jesus. He’s done nothing deserving of execution. So, Pilate will teach him a lesson and then release him.
- “Crucify him and release Barabbas,” the mob shouts. Barabbas has been put in prison for causing *stasis*—which means civil unrest, insurrection, or revolution—and for committing murder. Allegedly, there was a custom at Passover in accordance with which the Roman governor released one Jewish prisoner. Pilate proposes to



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**Jesus of Nazareth was crucified after he was arrested outside of Jerusalem and put to trial.**

release Jesus, but the more Pilate indicates his unease, the more the crowd bays for Jesus's crucifixion. This is what the author of Saint Matthew's Gospel tells us.

- Pilate considers Jesus to be innocent of anything that he would recognize as a crime, and if he had his way, he would simply release him. But he also senses that he has a potential riot on his hands and that, given the fact that it is Passover, a riot might easily turn into a full-scale insurrection. So, Pilate opts for the safer course: He goes along with the crowd and releases Barabbas while having Jesus flogged before handing him back to the Jews.
- Pilate could not have imagined that he was making such a momentous decision when he called for a bowl of water in which to wash his hands after he handed the prisoner over for crucifixion, as Saint Matthew's Gospel tells us. Ridding himself of Jesus was, in Pilate's view, an entirely pragmatic decision.

### Suggested Reading

Crossan, *Jesus*.

Grant, *Jesus*.

Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What does the interrogation of Jesus tell us about relations between the Jews and the Romans?
2. Is it important to try to discover who the historical Jesus was?

# Jerusalem Tinderbox: Temple in Flames

## Lecture 14

**I**t is October of 66 C.E. Desperate bandits roam the countryside. Famine is rife. And there is deep political unrest in the land. Judea has been descending into anarchy for years, and the situation is about to reach rock bottom. By the time the Great Jewish Revolt ends in 70 C.E., the Jews who survive witness the destruction of their city, and their Temple becomes a heap of rubble, hosting a pagan sacrifice and with legionary standards atop of what remains.

### The Great Jewish Revolt

- In the long annals of atrocities and tragedies suffered by the Jewish people, the Great Jewish Revolt—which breaks out in 66 C.E.—is among the most terrible. We know a great deal about it because the details are narrated by a Jewish writer known as Flavius Josephus in his historical account of the revolt known as *The Jewish Wars*. Josephus has a front-row seat when the revolt breaks out, initially as a commander of Jewish rebel forces and later from the Roman side as a collaborator.
- Relations between the Jews and the Romans have steadily worsened in the years leading up to the outbreak of the revolt. Extremist groups preach rebellion and insist that the Jews should refuse to pay tribute to Rome and no longer acknowledge the emperor as their master. The Romans have just about managed to keep a lid on things, but their relationship with the Jewish aristocracy—with whom they traditionally cooperated—is deteriorating as well. Judea is a tinderbox waiting to catch fire.
- Josephus tells us that the seeds of the Great Jewish Revolt were sown 60 years beforehand, when the Romans carried out a census under the authority of the governor of Syria. The Jews regarded this census as tantamount to slavery. They now had to take an oath of allegiance

to the emperor, endure military occupation, undergo taxation, and submit to the Roman governor of Judea in matters of public order.

- The Roman Empire is essentially nondivisive and quiescent. In general, the Romans have had good relations with the Jews. At the same time, the Romans are deeply suspicious of Judaism as a religious system, which makes conflict between Roman imperialism and Judaism inevitable, no matter how diplomatically the Romans behave toward the Jews, or vice versa.
- The ultimate cause of the Great Jewish Revolt, however, is the fact that the Jews feel a deep and crushing sense of resentment, insult, and degradation. Elite Jews such as Josephus are deeply influenced by the Greek culture, but whenever there's a disagreement between the Greeks and the Jews, the Romans invariably side with the Greeks. As a result, there is bad blood between the Jews and the Greeks. In addition to this, the Jews have to deal with many insults at the hands of the Romans.

### **Igniting the Tinderbox in Judea**

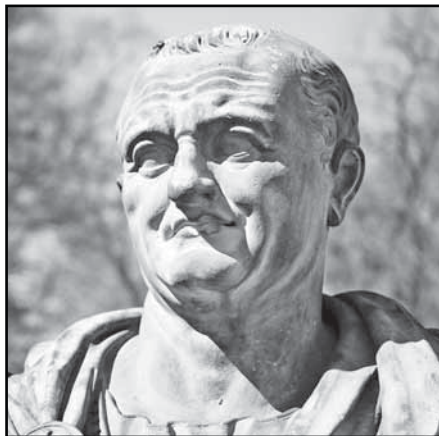
- Now, the tinderbox in Judea is finally about to ignite. The immediate cause is Jewish dissatisfaction with the imposition of taxes. Roman citizens are attacked. The Romans respond by plundering the sacred Temple in Jerusalem and executing up to 6,000 Jews. A full-scale revolt results.
- In mid-October, the governor of Syria, Gaius Cestius Gallus, leads an army of 30,000 troops from his capital in Antioch—near Antakya in modern-day Turkey—to Jerusalem. Gallus expects to quash the revolt in a matter of weeks. But he fails dismally and, during his retreat, is caught in an ambush. About 6,000 Romans are killed. It is one of the most humiliating defeats the Romans have ever sustained. Even so, it turns out to be the rebels' last victory.
- A few months later, in the spring of 67, the Romans return to Judea, this time with about 60,000 troops. Their commander is Titus Flavius Vespasianus, or Vespasian, the future Roman emperor.



He now begins the siege at Jotapata. Vespasian's son, Titus, eventually breaks through. According to Josephus, 40,000 Jews are slaughtered. As a result, Galilee and other parts of the province are now subjugated and come under Vespasian's control.

- All of those who can flee from Jotapata to Jerusalem do so. Jerusalem at this time can stand comparison with any city of its size in the ancient world. Herod the Great, the king who ruled Judea under Roman supervision from 37 B.C.E. to 4 B.C.E., remodeled Jerusalem on Greek lines because he was more Greek than Jewish in his cultural orientation. As a result, Jerusalem has a hippodrome, an amphitheater, a theater, a palace with three massive towers, and a near-impregnable fortress.
- Its crowning glory is the magnificent Temple, constructed in white stone and furnished with abundant gold coping. Work on the Temple began in 20 B.C.E., during Herod's reign. The building was probably finished only a few years before the outbreak of the revolt. At the time of the revolt, the Temple is transformed into a fortress, which the insurgents promise to defend to the death.
- However, the ability of freedom fighters inside of Jerusalem to resist the Romans is constantly undermined by internal divisions. In effect, a civil war rages inside the city. The extremists begin killing the moderates. And after at last disposing of the moderate faction, the extremists begin fighting among themselves. For as long as the Jews kill one another, Vespasian is content to leave them to it. He knows that Jerusalem is virtually impregnable, and he is not ready to tie his troops down to a protracted siege.
- In June of 68 C.E., news reaches Vespasian that the emperor Nero has committed suicide. This means that Vespasian has to suspend all military operations in Judea. Roman law requires it. Like all other Roman military commanders, Vespasian will have to wait to be reappointed—and receive orders from Nero's successor—before he can take any further action. It's at this point that Rome goes into free fall.

- This is the famous “Year of the Four Emperors.” After Nero’s first successor, Galba, has been assassinated and his second successor, Otho, has committed suicide and his third successor, Vitellius, has been tortured and beheaded in December of 69, Vespasian becomes emperor, establishing a new dynasty known as the Flavian Dynasty. Vespasian will rule this empire for 10 years.
- Vespasian needs to consolidate his rule, because his position as emperor is by no means secure. And he knows that there is no better way to do this than by achieving a spectacular military victory.



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**Vespasian established the Flavian Dynasty, ruling it for 10 years.**

### **Jerusalem under Siege**

- In the last six months of the four-year revolt, from about March to August of 70 C.E., Jerusalem itself is under siege. What makes the pending military resolution of this revolt so unutterably tragic is that it inflicts great suffering on the civilian population as well as on Jerusalem, one of the greatest cities in antiquity.
- Vespasian gives orders to his son Titus to launch an all-out attack. And while up until now he has been reluctant to commit troops to a siege, he has decided that he needs a victory. Vespasian cannot conduct the attack himself, however. He needs to be in Rome, keeping an eye on things. So, he places his son Titus in charge of the operation.
- Titus begins the assault early in the spring of 70 C.E. He has approximately one-quarter of Rome’s total fighting strength under his command. While the Jews have taken great steps to make the city

impregnable, which they believe it virtually is, the city's defenders have not reckoned with the Romans' will and ruthlessness.

- Titus builds battering rams, catapults, and towers. The largest of the battering rams smashes through the city's first wall, and then through the second wall. Once the second wall is breached, it becomes apparent that the besieged city is bound to fall.
- Even so, the Jewish extremists insist on fighting. It is a heroic decision, but also a terrible and tragic one, because it means that many thousands of civilians will die. To make matters worse, the extremists incinerate a large supply of food that could have fed the city for many years. They do this to bring home to the besieged population the message that there is no other option available to them and that they will die fighting for the cause. In the end, Titus starves the defenders into submission by encircling Jerusalem with a wall nearly five miles in circumference.
- Josephus, who observes the siege from the safety of the Roman encampment outside the city walls, tells us that before Titus makes his final assault, he debates with his officers about whether to destroy the glorious Temple or to leave it standing. If it is destroyed, it will be a permanent monument to Roman barbarity. If it is left standing, it could be a center for future Jewish resistance. In the end, Titus decides to save the Temple.
- Once his soldiers break in, however, chaos ensues. Romans begin butchering Jews indiscriminately, making no distinction between civilian and soldier. Then, tragically, a Roman soldier seizes a firebrand and tosses it into the Temple, causing the building to catch fire. Titus orders the fire to be extinguished, but no one obeys him, and the Temple burns to the ground.
- Six thousand unarmed civilians perish in the conflagration. Once the fire is extinguished, the Romans set up their legionary standards on its foundations and perform a sacrifice, hailing Titus as *imperator*, the title the Romans give to a general after a great victory.

- The siege is not quite yet over, however. There are still some defenders in the Upper City who offer to enter into negotiations with the Romans. Titus is furious. On several occasions, he's offered the insurgents peace terms, and each time they have refused.
- The city's defenders request permission to leave Jerusalem—in effect, to go and live in the desert. This makes Titus even more furious. If the defenders acknowledged that there was nothing left to fight for, Jerusalem might have been spared. But they don't. So, Titus—who had previously been inclined to be lenient—now gives the order to raze the entire city to the ground.
- Once the Romans break into the Upper City, they show no mercy. When it is all over, Titus gives orders that 500 Jewish prisoners are to be crucified each day. He rescinds the directive only when the Romans run out of wood to make crosses.
- Josephus puts the total number of Jews killed at 1.1 million, although that number is undoubtedly vastly inflated. Josephus says that the majority of the slaughtered are not Jews from Jerusalem but, rather, from elsewhere in Judea. Many were visiting Jerusalem at the time of Passover and were caught up in the siege by accident.

### After the Revolt

- Enormous wealth enters Rome's imperial coffers as a result of the sack of Jerusalem, partly from the sale of Jewish slaves. Tens of thousands of Jews are sold into slavery—97,000, according to Josephus. Following the siege of Jerusalem, Titus is hailed *imperator* by his troops, and Vespasian gets the victory he so desperately needs to consolidate his claim to the imperial throne.
- Vespasian dies in 79 C.E., and Titus, who succeeds him as emperor, dies two years later. The following year, Titus's younger brother, the emperor Domitian, erects a triumphal arch in his honor. This is the so-called Arch of Titus, just to the southeast of the Roman Forum along the Via Sacra, or Sacred Way. Titus's destruction of Jerusalem is among victories commemorated on the arch named for him.

- The siege of Jerusalem might have cut the heart out of Judaism, but of course it didn't. Indeed, the Jews revolt again 60 years later, when the emperor Hadrian decides to refound Jerusalem as a pagan city named Aelia Capitolina and erect in its center a temple to the god Jupiter Capitolinus, after whom the city is to be named. This revolt—known as the Bar Kokhba Revolt, after its charismatic leader Simon bar Kokhba—takes three years to suppress and causes the deaths of an estimated half a million Jews more. Eventually, Jerusalem will prevail once again.
- All that remains today of the once-spectacular Temple is the great platform upon which it once stood, today called the Temple Mount. On the western side is the Wailing Wall, arguably the most sacred spot in the world for Jews, who regard it as a place of pilgrimage and prayer and who to this day lament the destruction of their Temple.

### Suggested Reading

Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*.

Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*.

Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*.

Josephus, *The Jewish War*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What factors made the Great Jewish Revolt inevitable?
2. How did the outcome of the Great Jewish Revolt affect the course of Jewish history?

# Roman Colosseum: Blood in the Arena

## Lecture 15

It's June of 80 C.E., and the Roman emperor Titus is about to open the newly completed Colosseum. Titus is dedicating this public landmark for the enjoyment of the Roman people—with the calculated intent of winning their favor. During the 100 days of gladiatorial combat to come, Titus will celebrate the consolidation of his family dynasty, the Flavians. Titus and the Roman people will also enjoy the return to shared glories of the piece of real estate that the Colosseum sits on, which had been squandered on one of Titus's predecessors, Emperor Nero. And Titus will be paying homage to his father, Vespasian, who ended the chaos left by Nero.

### The Colosseum

- The Colosseum took 12 years to complete and will realize Vespasian's vision to rededicate the land as a great public space. It rises directly upon Nero's former personal estate, which featured a palatial home, private gardens, and an artificial lake. All Romans are welcome here now.
- The Colosseum is many things to many people throughout the ages. It's not only a sporting venue. The Latin word for "gladiatorial games" is *munera*, which means "gifts." This helps us understand why Titus and Vespasian before him felt that they performed a great public service by constructing the Colosseum and by sponsoring the shows it would host. The *munera* were a testimony to the emperors' benevolence. And each emperor expected to be remembered for them.
- The Colosseum is also intended to be read by the citizenry as a statement of Roman power, specifically the power to crush anyone who might seek to resist Rome's authority. Those who will fight and die here—men and beasts alike—do so to entertain the Roman crowd.

- But the gladiators also speak of Rome's dominion. That is evident even in the source of funding for the Colosseum's construction. Much of the cost was borne by the sale of Jewish prisoners after Vespasian's son Titus quelled the Great Jewish Revolt in Judea (66–70 C.E.).
- The Colosseum also makes an eloquent statement about filial piety. Begun by Vespasian, and completed by Titus, it is the perfection of a noble ideal—that of a son paying homage to his father through a publicly visible commemoration.
- For the Colosseum's opening ceremony, and for the immense killing carnival to unfold in the days ahead, Titus has purchased scores of gladiators. These are captive slaves and imprisoned criminals plucked from the dregs of society, along with thousands of wild animals brought from distant Africa and Asia.



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**The Colosseum was opened to the public in June of 80 C.E., and 100 days of gladiatorial combat ensued.**

## The History of Gladiatorial Contests

- Gladiatorial contests were first introduced into Rome in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E., originating in Etruria—modern-day Tuscany—where they were held at the funerals of dead soldiers. It was believed that the dead took pleasure in these contests and also that they were nourished by the blood that was shed.
- The first politician to realize that gladiatorial contests could be used to secure the goodwill of the *plebs*, the ordinary Roman people, was Julius Caesar. In 46 B.C.E., Caesar sponsored a contest in memory of his father, who had died 20 years earlier. It proved to be enormously successful, and he garnered much popularity as a result. Caesar's games were held in the Roman Forum, which became the regular venue for such entertainments.
- The first permanent amphitheater was built in the Campus Martius—the “Field of Mars”—outside the city walls, during the reign of Augustus. Nero built a much larger, purpose-built structure in the Campus Martius, but it was destroyed in the Great Fire of 64 C.E. The area occupied by the Colosseum, which lies a short distance east of the Forum, was also devastated by the Great Fire.
- Afterward, Nero appropriated the land for his own use and built on it the grandiose palace known as the Domus Aurea, the Golden House. An artificial lake fronted the estate, surrounded by gardens with porticoes and pavilions. At the entrance rose a huge bronze statue of Nero known as the Colossus Neronis.
- When Vespasian became emperor, he tore down the Domus Aurea and used the 125 acres of land there to provide the people of Rome with an amphitheater worthy of the great empire they controlled. Vespasian didn't destroy the Colossus Neronis. Instead, his sculptors transformed it into a statue of Sol Invictus, thereby honoring the sun god of the empire and the patron of Rome's military.
- The auditorium that Vespasian built and Titus completed was not formally known as the Colosseum during their time; rather,



it is the Amphitheatrum Flavium, named for the dynasty. But the old “Colossus” will eventually give the “Colosseum” the name it acquired during the Middle Ages.

## The Structure

- The original Colosseum would dominate the Roman skyline and be visible for miles around. It rises three stories high, standing more than 57 meters tall, and features half columns held together by the signature of Roman architecture: the arch.
- The Colosseum is an engineering wonder for its time—and for all time. It’s entirely freestanding. Its outer wall is made of marble—100,000 cubic meters of marble—originally held in place with 300 tons of metal clamps. And while the outer wall of the building is today only partly intact, the inner wall remains well preserved. Massive slabs of travertine marble were used to erect the gigantic edifice, hauled by oxcart from Tivoli, about 25 miles away.
- Elliptical in shape, the Colosseum extends 188 meters on its long axis and 156 meters on its short axis. An ellipse has two focus points, meaning that the Colosseum was designed to have two foci of entertainment at either end.
- Eighty entrances provide access to the building at ground level, ensuring that spectators can enter and leave the building quickly in case of an emergency. Passageways enable spectators to reach the upper tiers.
- What lies underground—beneath the wooden floor covered with sand and hidden from view—is no less astounding in terms of its complex engineering. Added later by the emperor Domitian, who ruled from 81 to 96 C.E., the underground *hypogeum* consists of a series of corridors and chambers designed to keep separate the wild beasts that are going to be fighting one another. It is equipped with winches, pulleys, and counterweights to hoist stage scenery, props, and caged animals to the surface of the amphitheater.

- We don't know the precise seating capacity of the Colosseum. Modern scholars generally reckon it to have been about 50,000 people, although a late Roman source claims that it could accommodate 87,000.

### The Gladiatorial Games

- Going to the Colosseum isn't like attending the Greek Theater of Dionysus. If you don't get to the Colosseum the first day, there are 99 more to follow—making a total of 100 days of wall-to-wall gladiatorial spectacle. Our major source for the inaugural games is the poet Martial, who is a great fan of gladiatorial combat and may be in attendance at the opening ceremony.
- Putting on any major show—let alone one that will last for 100 days—requires a great deal of organization. So, if you live in Rome during this period, you'll have seen the feverish preparations going on for months in advance of the opening ceremony.
- The gladiators are housed near the Colosseum, where they train at the Ludus Magnus, the Great School. This is an opportunity for aficionados of the “sport” to place their bets on which gladiators will win their bouts. The evening before they fight, the gladiators are treated to a *cena libera*—a “free meal,” a slap-up banquet.
- Where spectators sit in the amphitheater is determined by their social status. Commoners are banished to the upper tier. Senators sit down below, almost at ground level, in the best seats. There are also special boxes at the north and south ends: one for the emperor and his family and another for the Vestal Virgins, the chaste priestesses who tend to Rome's sacred hearth in the Temple of Vesta. The games are free, but spectators are given a shard of pottery with a number on it that will direct them to their specific seats.
- The day begins with a *pompa*, or formal procession. Slaves enter holding placards announcing the day's attractions, including the names of the gladiators who will fight. Then, the gladiators file in. The crowd cheers. The wild beasts remain penned outside of view.

They haven't been fed in days, so it would be too dangerous to display them in the arena.

- Next, the emperor's lictors—junior officials—enter, carrying rods and axes. These fasces, as they are called, symbolize an emperor's ability to administer corporal and capital punishment. When Titus arrives, likely stepping down from a chariot, the cheers of the crowd become deafening.
- Contests involving wild beasts—the *venationes*, or “hunts” as they are called—are held in the morning. These can take several forms. Hunters armed with nets might seek to ensnare the beasts and kill them, or contests pitting different species might be staged against a suitably colorful and exotic background.
- During the lunch hour, there is a lull in the proceedings. To keep the entertainment flowing, executions of condemned criminals might be staged. After lunch, the main attraction—the gladiatorial contests—takes place.
- Gladiatorial combat at the Colosseum's inaugural games is preceded by warm-up exercises. During the *prolusio*, or “pregame,” the gladiators prepare with *arma lusoria*, or mock weapons made of wood, for the fights to the death that follow. The conclusion of the *prolusio* is signaled by a trumpet blast, and the combat arms are now distributed. Then, the emperor gives the signal for battle to begin, with several pairs of gladiators squaring off at the same time.
- It is customary for gladiators to fight one another wearing contrasting armor and with different weapons. Fighting rules known as the *lex pugnandi* govern the contests. We know little about these, however. Music also accompanies the human drama, punctuating the high points and helping to stimulate audience emotions.
- Not all fights conclude in death. When a gladiator has been defeated, he can ask for a *missio*—a reprieve—by pointing upward with his left index finger. It is then up to the emperor to decide his fate. If the

combatant has put up a good show and has been entertaining, the likelihood is that he will be spared. Much depends on the crowd's verdict.

- If the spectators scream “*Ure!*” (“Burn!”), “*Iugula!*” (“Kill!”), and “*Verbera!*” (“Beat!”), the chances are that mercy is not in the cards. The emperor will signal to the referee, known as the *summa rudis*, to order the victorious gladiator to deliver the coup de grace.
- Just in case a fallen gladiator attempts to fake death, a slave dressed in the garb of Dis Pater—the god of the underworld—goes around with a hot iron to check for signs of life. If the hapless man is still alive, the slave smashes in his skull with a hammer.
- The crowds who attend these games interpret the blood sport as lusty entertainment. Still, the scale of slaughter is difficult to comprehend. The Roman historian Suetonius, who writes a biography of the emperor Titus, says that on one day alone, 5,000 animals are slaughtered. If that figure is extrapolated over 100 days, it would mean that as many as half a million beasts are killed. The Greek historian Dio, more modestly, puts the total at 9,000, or 90 per day.
- Whatever the death toll, nobody seems to complain at the time, according to the records we have. Rome has an appetite for blood and gore that is unimaginable in the modern age. The Colosseum is something of a symbol of everything that is most repugnant about the Roman world: its barbarism, its contempt for human life, its taste for violence, its gloating upon human misery.
- But in a restive empire where war is the normal state of things, the games are a diverting means of channeling the people's propensity for violence. In addition, the games generate tremendous goodwill toward the emperor—and, thus, to the empire. And from a Roman perspective, the lives of a few thousand humans and beasts—or perhaps tens of thousands—is a small price to pay for such a big dividend.

- Gladiatorial combat persists as ritual entertainment for 300 years after the Colosseum's opening games. The last known gladiatorial contest takes place on January 1, 404 C.E.

### Suggested Reading

Fagan, *The Lure of the Arena*.

Hopkins and Beard, *The Colosseum*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What does the Colosseum teach us about Roman values and aspirations?
2. Why did so few Romans find the games unpalatable?

# Visigoth King Alaric Descends on Rome

## Lecture 16

The following tale reveals how large contours of history can be shaped by individual personalities. The story is told through two men: the Roman emperor Honorius, who ruled in the West from 395 to 423—and whose survival strategy is to buy protection from the invading barbarians—and a Visigoth invader named Alaric, whose relatively modest ambition is to be awarded the title of Roman general and to receive annual tributes of gold and grain for his people.

### The Decline of Rome

- It is August of 410, and Alaric is making his final attempt to negotiate a peaceful coexistence with the Romans. The invader has abandoned all of his previous demands—the gold, grain, and Roman generalship—and is asking only for the wretched province of Noricum, which is the central part of what today is Austria plus Slovenia.
- Greek historian Zosimus, writing a century after the events, tells us that when Alaric's offer is read aloud in Honorius's court, everyone is "struck by the fellow's moderation." No less confounding is the fact that Honorius flatly refuses to accept it. Learning of this decision, Alaric begins the historic sack of Rome.
- In Rome at large, the situation is dire. Chaos reigns. The army has just withdrawn from Spain (Hispania) and is about to abandon Britain (Britannia). Waves of Germanic tribesmen—the "barbarians" as we collectively call them—are sweeping across the Italian peninsula. They are fighting native Romans and also fighting one another while plundering the empire for survival. Every day, they pose a greater threat to the weakened central authorities.
- Rome's decline has begun nearly two centuries earlier. Around the year 235 C.E., the emperor Severus Alexander was murdered in

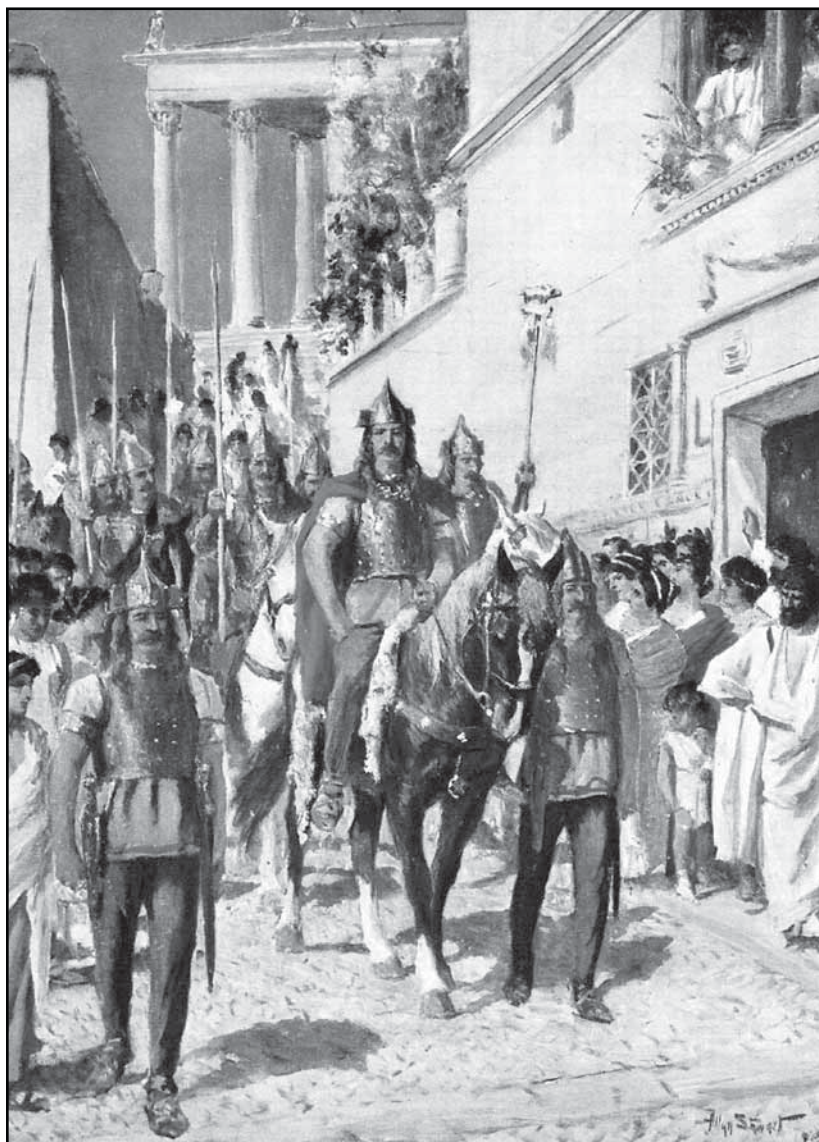
a mutiny led by one of his army commanders. From this moment forward, the empire becomes increasingly unstable. Invading tribes of Goths, Visigoths, Huns, and Vandals move into the power vacuum, fighting one another and threatening the imperial authorities. The Goths and Romans have never been implacable enemies; they've had close links since the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, particularly in trade.

- In the half-century from 235 to 284, the Roman Senate will ratify no fewer than 25 emperors, and that's not counting the several pretenders who create fiefdoms and lay claim to the imperial purple. The Romans who live in the capital become increasingly anxious to protect themselves from the barbarian hordes that are sweeping into Italy from the north.
- Around the year 270, the emperor Aurelian begins work on the so-called Aurelian Wall, a 12-mile long defensive barrier around Rome, with no fewer than 381 projecting watchtowers. His successor, the emperor Probus, completes the project about 10 years later.
- Although the barbarians are sharply differentiated from one another in their ethnic allegiances, they sometimes combine to achieve a particular objective. Many of them, too, become semi-Romanized through contact with the indigenous population living inside of their empire. They adopt Roman manners and come to value Roman ideals. And some, too, such as Alaric, are eager to take their place in the social hierarchy. The barbarians are not intent on destroying the empire; rather, they want accommodation within it.
- Increasingly, over the course of time, the Roman Empire has become too unwieldy to administer as a single unit, so eventually it split into a western and eastern half. In 395, the empire is divided between the two sons of the late emperor Theodosius I: Arcadius is given the eastern half, and Honorius rules the western half, which includes the city of Rome. Never again will the two halves be ruled by a single emperor.

## Honorius and Alaric

- Honorius doesn't command much respect. He is neither diligent nor hardworking. He seems largely content to leave Rome to its fate. He doesn't have a particularly large army, so the only way he could defend Rome is by buying off the invaders, which he does, first by promising to pay an indemnity if the barbarians will just go away, and then by failing to deliver on his promise once they do so.
- As a devout Christian, Honorius also takes the disastrous step of excluding from office—including from the military—all pagans, as well as all those who subscribe to Arianism, a heresy proposed by the early-4<sup>th</sup>-century Alexandrian cleric Arius. As a result of this policy, Honorius deprives himself of the services of thousands of able administrators and officers.
- Honorius's fateful opponent—Alaric—is a charismatic Germanic leader who styles himself king of the Visigoths, or the western Goths. The Goths, a Germanic people of uncertain origin, have won a spectacular victory in 378 over the Romans at Adrianopolis, in modern-day Turkey, near the border between Greece and Bulgaria. The Romans were routed, and the body of their emperor, Valens, who led them into battle, was never found.
- Alaric's name means "Everyone's King," and it reflects the fact that he has attracted people of different backgrounds to his banner. In particular, he has united two Gothic tribes—the Tervingi and Greuthungi—who are what we know today as the Visigoths. His army also includes 10,000 barbarians who deserted the Roman army—hoping undoubtedly for plunder—as well as a large number of runaway slaves.
- What really gives Alaric the advantage over the emperor is when Honorius's *magister militum*—or "master of the armed forces" (a half-Roman and half-Vandal named Flavius Stilicho)—is accused in 408 of conspiring with the barbarians and seeking to have his son elevated to the throne.





Alaric, king of the Visigoths from 395 to 423 C.E., led the army that sacked Rome in 410.

- Up to this point, the emperor has been dominated by Stilicho. He has married Stilicho's daughter, Maria, and when Maria died, he married her sister Thermantia. After the alleged betrayal, Honorius has Stilicho executed and orders the massacre of thousands of Goths serving in the Roman army, whose loyalty he now suspects because they lament Stilicho's death.
- This is a fatal misjudgment on Honorius's part. The survivors—about 30,000 in all—join forces with Alaric in what becomes a very motley army, but one that is armed to the teeth. The Goths are being propelled from behind by the Huns, a nomadic people who originated in Mongolia. Like any refugee population, they need food and a place to settle. Desperation motivates them as much as greed.
- Alaric must demonstrate considerable leadership skills to hold them together, especially when their morale is at a low ebb. He undoubtedly makes all sorts of extravagant promises to those who take up his banner: land, plunder, security, and an end to their wanderings. But Alaric has his own agenda, as well. He wants recognition by the Roman establishment. He doesn't want to destroy the empire; he wants a part of it.

### **Alaric's Invasions**

- Alaric first invades Italy in 401 and then again the next year. In 408, he returns, with his sights set on Rome. After pillaging a number of cities on the way south, he encamps outside the city walls by November. He then begins a blockade to cut off grain shipments to Rome from North Africa, on which the population is dependent.
- Soon, the inhabitants are dying by the thousands, and famine is aggravated by plague. Eventually, Alaric agrees to relax the siege in return for a huge indemnity of gold, silver, silk, and pepper. The Roman Senate agrees to pay the Goth general 5,000 pounds of gold and 30,000 pounds of silver—worth more than 100 million dollars today—as well as 4,000 silk robes and 3,000 pounds of pepper.

- But ransom is not what Alaric desires most keenly; he wants to be commander in chief of the Western Roman army. And this Honorius stoutly refuses to give him. So, in 409, Alaric returns yet again, besieging Rome once more, although he again lifts the assault after the governor of the province of Africa—in support of Honorius—interrupts the regular flow of essential grain supplies from North Africa, because he knows that if no grain is arriving to feed Rome, his army won't be fed either.
- In 410, Alaric makes a final effort to negotiate with Honorius. All he asks for is the northern province of Noricum. Honorius, however, refuses, whereupon Alaric elevates a Roman senator to the rank of emperor and initiates a rebellion. Only now, at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, does Honorius agree to negotiate.
- But then, Alaric is within five or six miles of Ravenna when a rival Goth named Sarus ambushes him. Sarus, too, has been seeking the post of commander in chief of the Western Roman army. Because he marshals only a small band of followers—and fears Alaric's forces—Sarus has recently allied himself to Honorius. However, it's unclear whether in attacking Alaric he's operating under Honorius's orders or acting upon his own initiative.
- Assuming that Sarus is attacking him on the orders of the emperor, Alaric breaks off the seemingly promising negotiations and heads back to Rome. Around midnight on August 24, 410, Alaric bursts through Rome's Salarian Gate, which is part of the former emperor Aurelian's great wall.
- Alaric does not reduce the city to a pile of rubble, as he could so easily have done. Even after Alaric's troops have been pillaging Rome for three days, much of the city remains intact. It is the first time in nearly 800 years that Rome has been sacked.
- Only a small portion of the city is set on fire in this attack. The hardest-hit areas are around the Salarian Gate and the Roman Forum. Many thousands of people will perish, with thousands more

taken prisoner. Hundreds of women are raped; hundreds of others are sold into prostitution. And a great deal of property is looted. Allegedly, however, only one senator perishes by the sword.

### The Aftermath

- The loss of Rome to the barbarians does not signal the downfall of the empire in the West. Rome had not been the site of the imperial residence for 35 years. However, the Roman Empire will—from this point forward—cease to exercise meaningful control over the western Mediterranean.
- Further, more and greater disasters will follow shortly. The loss of Carthage—the capital of Roman Africa—to the Vandals a generation later proves to be a much greater blow to the empire. Carthage is a hub for the collection and distribution of grain from North Africa to Italy and also is second only to Rome in population throughout the West. At least in name, however, the Western Roman Empire will continue to exist until the very brief reign of Romulus Augustus, “Little Augustus” (475–476 C.E.).
- Ravenna itself survives unscathed. The unambitious and uninspiring Emperor Honorius lives until August 15, 423, almost 13 years to the day after the sack of Rome. No hero who defends his empire to the death, Honorius expires of pulmonary edema, a build-up of fluid in the lungs. He leaves no heir.
- Alaric, by comparison, is a tragic figure. Having spent the greater part of his lifetime seeking a homeland for his people and an official title for himself, he obtains neither. On August 29, 410—after just six days in the city—Alaric departs with his victorious army, heading south along the Appian Way, destroying all in his path, until he arrives at Calabria, on the toe of the Italian peninsula.
- Alaric is intent now on launching an attack on Sicily, and then seizing North Africa, which is his new goal. He sees Africa as a power base from which he will be able to cut off all of Italy’s corn

supply and starve it into submission. However, he loses a large part of his fleet in a storm and dies of a fever soon afterward.

- Alaric is succeeded by his brother-in-law Athaulf, who abandons the general's original plan to hunker down in Africa. Instead, Athaulf turns around his army and the extended community that accompanies it and leads them north into Gaul, which by now has broken away from the western empire. They settle in Aquitaine, in today's southwest France, bordering on the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Pyrenees to the south.

### Suggested Reading

Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell*.

Heather, *Goths and Romans 332–489*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Why was Honorius so resistant to making a deal with Alaric?
2. Did Alaric change the course of history in any significant way?

# Nika Riots at the Racetrack: Theodora

## Lecture 17

Three days ago, the leaders of two tough political factions were found guilty of murder after a riot and were taken out of the city to be hanged. But as fate would have it, the gallows scaffolding broke. Two of the accused murderers have survived and escaped. One of them is the leader of a faction known as the Blues, which support a local chariot-racing stable. The other is a leader of the rival Greens, which support a competing chariot-racing team. The opposing factions are about to join together and petition Emperor Justinian to pardon the men—on the grounds that God already has miraculously spared them.

### Chariot Racing in Constantinople

- It's January 13, 532, in Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. As many as 80,000 spectators are seated in the hippodrome, preparing for a spectacular slate of chariot races. In the marble imperial box known as the *kathisma*—which is situated at the eastern end of the track—Justinian and his wife, Theodora, take note of the crowd and the two rival chariot teams. The rough-and-tumble supporters of the Blues and the Greens—these “factions” as we call them—wear their team colors and hurl insults at each other.
- There's nothing unusual about the crowd using a day at the hippodrome to petition the emperor for a favor. In fact, it's customary to shout out requests between the races. After all, this is when the excitement of the occasion—and the good cheer that goes with it—are most likely to make Justinian favorably disposed toward their requests. Plus, it is the only time when commoners can express their demands in a way that guarantees that the emperor will take notice.
- Often, the shouting is orchestrated by the aristocrats, who use the occasion to advance their own agendas. But on this day, the atmosphere is very different from usual. The tension makes even the emperor and his closest circle uneasy. Then, something happens

that has never occurred before: The supporters of the Blues and the Greens join in unison to hurl insults at the emperor.

- It's clearly going to be a long day for the emperor. Twenty-four chariot races are scheduled, each one a grinding contest of skill, bravado, nerve, and luck. Deathly spills raise the color of the crowd. And after each race, the supporters of the Blues and Greens alike petition Justinian to pardon the convicted men.
- Each time the crowd petitions the emperor, Justinian obstinately ignores this unruly horde. After the 22<sup>nd</sup> race, the shouts of the mob congeal into one voice, crying, "Long life to the merciful Blues and Greens!" They are clearly mocking what might normally be respectful homage to the emperor. And their chant shifts aggressively to "*Nika! Nika! Nika!*" This is Greek for "Victory! Victory! Victory!" It is the name we give to this extraordinary event—the Nika riots—a popular protest the likes of which have never been seen before in history.
- Sensing that anything could happen—and fearing that the crowd could rise up and tear them apart—Justinian and Theodora bolt from the hippodrome to the palace, and they seal themselves off from the baying mob. Their closest aides and select members of the Senate huddle with them.

## **The Byzantine Empire**

- The Byzantine Empire is named after an early Greek settlement called Byzantium, which stood on the site of the later city Constantinople. The emperor Constantine celebrated its founding as his new capital with chariot races in the year 330. With it, the center of gravity in the Mediterranean shifted from Italy in the west to the Balkans—and to points further east. Today, we know Constantinople as Istanbul. During Justinian's time, Constantinople was arguably the greatest metropolis on the planet, with a population close to a million.
- The Byzantine Empire survives, whereas the western half doesn't. The defining moment in terms of the Roman Empire's separation

comes in 395, with the death of Theodosius I, the last emperor to rule both East and West. His grandson, Theodosius II, is the first Roman emperor to be born in Constantinople and to rule there throughout his reign, which lasts from 408 to 450.

- The long reign of Theodosius II ensured stability. And that, in turn, cemented Constantinople's prominence. The oddity is that the Byzantine emperors saw themselves as upholding traditional Roman values and institutions. And in many ways, they did. Constantinople's constitution was based on the Roman model, with a Senate and annually elected magistrates.
- There is no distinction between Church and state in the Byzantine Empire. The two comprise a single, indivisible entity. This means that it is the emperor's duty to attend to the physical and spiritual welfare of his subjects. And just recently, Justinian has managed to offend both leading factions: the Blues and the Greens. Justinian and his advisors don't know how to defuse the tension.

### **Justinian and Theodora**

- Justinian I, who is known as "Justinian the Great," will rule the Byzantine Empire from 527 to 565. He's a parvenu of peasant extraction. His elevation to the imperial purple was due to the unexpected accession to the throne before him of his uncle Justin. Justinian thumbed his nose at proper society and at his uncle, before his accession, by wedding a former mime artist named Theodora.
- Theodora performed sex acts on stage; she may have been a prostitute. The Byzantine Church did not extend the sacrament to actors or prostitutes when the couple met. To make the situation more fraught, Justinian—as the heir to the throne—was destined also to be the head of the Byzantine Church. Brushing aside the condemnation of their match, however, the pair married.
- When Justinian does become emperor, he turns out to be authoritarian—and something of a social conservative. He's ruthless in his suppression of polytheism. He forces tens of thousands—



perhaps hundreds of thousands—to convert to Christianity. Those who refuse are exiled or executed. He also passes tough legislation against male homosexuals. And he tightens state oversight of Plato's famous Academy in Athens, an intellectual stronghold of polytheists.



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**Justinian, Byzantine emperor from 527 to 565 C.E., is known for his passion for governmental and legislative organization.**

- Justinian's other great passion is the law. He sets up a commission to recodify all the laws that have been enacted from the time of the emperor Hadrian down to the present, a period of approximately 400 years. The Corpus Juris Civilis, the Code of Civil Law—also known as the Code of Justinian—becomes a highly influential compilation of statutes and pronouncements. It brings order out of chaos to jurisprudence.
- At the same time, Justinian is, in many ways, a dreamer. He has the grandiose vision of restoring the Roman Empire to its former glory by recovering the territory that it lost during the previous century.
- Justinian does not himself conduct any military campaigns. Instead, he sends his great general, Belisarius: first to Africa to fight the Vandals, and then to Italy to fight the Ostrogoths. In both theaters of combat, Belisarius will be largely successful. At the time of the Nika riots, Belisarius happens to be very close to Constantinople, which is extremely fortunate for Justinian.
- Theodora is a woman of great beauty and high intelligence despite her lowly birth. She had become a public entertainer at a young age.

Justinian very likely consorted with members of the demimonde, like so many potentates and royals have done throughout history. Theodora was just 16 when she met Justinian. He was more than twice her age. Their marriage scandalized Church and court.

- The late Emperor Justin—Justinian's uncle—despite his initial opposition, eventually came around and passed a decree to the effect that an actress who had abandoned her former profession would no longer bear the taint of the association and be free to marry whomever she pleased—even a senator, which is the position Justinian held at the time.
- Once Theodora marries Justinian, she dramatically reinvents herself. She becomes his confidante at court and a model of wifely devotion, roles that she will perform to perfection throughout their 23 years of marriage.
- In the months leading up to the riots, Justinian has been raising taxes significantly, and this has provoked outrage among aristocracy and commoners alike. In addition, the Greens dislike Justinian because he and his wife favor the Blues. And then there is Theodora, a seemingly vulgar and ignorant upstart, a disgrace to polite society, and a stain upon the Church. So, there are many grievances bubbling just below the surface, and they are all ready to erupt.

### **Chariot Racing in the Ancient World**

- Chariot racing was a popular sport in the ancient world and had been ever since it became an Olympic event at the games of 680 B.C.E. Basically every major city acquired a hippodrome. The sport would remain prominent in the East—in Constantinople, in particular—as late as the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. In time, the factions became less violent, however, and the sport would cease to function as an outlet for the expression of popular discontent.
- The hippodrome at Constantinople is U-shaped. Tiers of seats surround the track. The wealthy sit on marble seats in the lowest

tier; the hoi polloi are relegated to wooden seats at the top, just like in the Colosseum.

- The gates where the horses wait before the race begins all open at the same time. The four-horse chariots dash out of their gates and hurtle around the track, reaching speeds of more than 40 miles per hour. Usually, two teams of horses represent each of the two stables or factions. Each race consists of about seven laps. The Dutch historian Fik Meijer has calculated that a chariot race would last about nine minutes.
- Pileups are frequent. They're so frequent that the slaves responsible for cleaning up the wreckage can hardly complete their job before horses, chariots, and drivers turn another lap and come hurtling down upon them again. Injuries and fatalities are the order of the day.
- Charioteers frequently start out as slaves, although in time they could grow to be rich and famous. In fact, hardly any celebrities in antiquity generate such fanatical devotion as charioteers. It's a decent profession—if you happen to survive.

### **To Fight or to Flee**

- A day after Justinian and Theodora make their hurried escape from the hippodrome to the adjoining palace, on January 14, Justinian makes a potentially fatal misjudgment. He agrees to resume the races, believing they will relieve the rioting that has ensued.
- Instead, the population becomes even more inflamed. A mob gathers at the *praetorium*, the headquarters of the police, and releases the prisoners and sets fire to the building. It also burns down the church of Hagia Sophia, along with the public baths and even part of the imperial palace.
- Justinian now faces the supreme crisis of his career. His life is in danger, and he contemplates fleeing from the capital. It is Theodora who changes the course of history. She says that she would rather die and be buried in the shroud of a ruler—because that is

honorable—than be buried in the attire of a commoner. In other words, she advises Justinian to hold fast rather than flee.

- Justinian is apparently deeply affected by her words. Energized, the emperor now orders his general Belisarius and a eunuch named Narses to put down the mob. Narses enters the hippodrome and succeeds at dividing the Blues from the Greens. The Blues attempt to bolt from the hippodrome. Belisarius and the imperial army block the exits and slaughter the rioters. It is one of history’s bloodbaths. The lowest ancient estimate puts the death toll at 30,000.
- After the Nika riots, Justinian deflects attention from Byzantium’s domestic problems by embarking on a war in Africa as part of his drive to reunite the Roman Empire. It takes him—or, rather, Belisarius—nearly 20 years to win back Italy alone. The campaign puts serious strains on Constantinople’s resources, and, in the long term, achieves very little.
- Then, in the spring of 542, Justinian survives an outbreak of the bubonic plague carried by Mediterranean black rats—“Justinian’s Plague,” we call it today. The pandemic is thought to have killed 25 million people, roughly a third of the empire’s population. Justinian dies peacefully in 565.

### Suggested Reading

Cameron, *Circus Factions*.

Meijer, *Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Does Justinian deserve the title “Great”?
2. Do mobs ever alter the course of history?

# The Concubine Empress: Wu Zetian

## Lecture 18

One day in the year 654 C.E., the Chinese emperor Gaozong is asked by his concubine Wu Chou to greet their newborn baby daughter for the first time. The concubine has previously borne the emperor's two sons, whereas his wife, the empress Wang, remains childless. When the emperor arrives to greet his newborn, Wu Chou pulls down the covers to reveal the baby and discovers that the child is dead—apparently from strangulation. Wu bursts into tears and asks her attendants what has happened. They say that the empress murdered the baby. But does the emperor believe the charges leveled by Wu Chou and her servants at Empress Wang?

### Wu Chou

- *The New Book of Tang*, an official history of China written in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, depicts Wu Chou as bloodthirsty, power hungry, and sex-crazed—typical charges throughout history leveled against women who do not accept the prescribed role that society has ordained for them.
- In time, Wu Chou will transform herself into the empress Wu Zetian, an extraordinary accomplishment that she achieves by supplanting the queen in the emperor's affections. Wu had many enemies who wanted to paint her in the worst light, even though by the end of Wu's more than 50 years at the imperial court, China will have made huge advances—economically, socially, and politically.
- Wu Chou was born in 624. Her family was quite prosperous. She received a classical Chinese education that emphasized music and literature. At the age of 14, she is selected to become a concubine—initially to the emperor Gaozong's father and predecessor, the emperor Taizhong. It was customary since the earliest times for China's noblemen to take concubines.

- In the imperial court, Wu Chou initially is appointed a *cairen*, meaning that she's a fifth-grade concubine, which means that she's little more than a maid. In time, however, she greatly impresses the aging ruler, who refers to her as Meiniang, which translates as "charming lady." She also attracts the eye of at least one of the emperor's 14 sons, Prince Gaozong. It's even possible that she goes out of her way to seduce Gaozong and that the pair began a clandestine affair behind the emperor's back.
- Gaozong's father, the emperor Taizhong, was the second emperor of the Tang Dynasty, which spans three centuries—from 618 to 907—and is often evaluated as the golden age of Chinese culture. Taizhong had assisted his own father, Li Yuan, in overthrowing the previous emperor, thereby bringing the Sui Dynasty to an end in 617. Taizhong is said to have ascended to power amid a dynastic feud that saw him ambush and kill two brothers before his father abdicated in his favor.
- Notwithstanding these violent beginnings, Taizhong brings peace and prosperity to China—or at least that is the image he carefully crafts in official accounts of his reign. He is largely responsible for reuniting China after a period of civil war. Late in life, Taizhong banishes his eldest son and presumed heir for organizing a revolt against him. And he then appoints his 9<sup>th</sup> son, the future Emperor Gaozong, to succeed him.
- When Taizhong dies, Wu Chou, who is now about 24 years old, is sent to live in a Buddhist convent. She faces a life of total seclusion and withdrawal. And indeed that might have been her lot in life, had not the new emperor Gaozong visited the convent where Wu Chou is confined. Gaozong arrives ostensibly to pay his respects to the spirit of his father on the anniversary of his death. But when he and Wu see each other, we are told, he is moved to tears.
- It all sounds very romantic and perhaps it was, although the negative press that accompanies Wu throughout her life and into the grave depicts her as a scheming and conniving temptress who

used this occasion to entrap Gaozong. Whatever the facts, Wu Chou is released from the convent soon afterward and returns to the imperial court as a second-grade concubine.

- A concubine has the capacity to cause serious rifts, particularly in the case of a concubine who supplants the wife in her husband's affections, or even in the case of one who is able to provide him with an heir, if his wife is barren. And because a husband can have many concubines, tension is almost inevitable among the concubines. Even in ideal circumstances, there is a delicate balance to maintain; all must compliantly accept their unequal statuses and roles.

### **The Rivalry**

- In 654 C.E., a rivalry emerges between the emperor's wife, the empress Wang, and Wu Chou. The competition is heightened by the fact that Wu Chou gives the emperor two sons while the empress remains childless.
- The official accounts suggest that Wu Chou has murdered her child to cast suspicions on her rival for the emperor's affections, the empress. In other words, she murdered her own daughter to advance her political career. But the testimony is fraught with obvious difficulties, and the verdict is by no means certain.
- It's just as likely that the story is an invention of Wu's detractors. She may genuinely suspect the empress of murder without any thoughts of her own advantage and advancement. It's also possible that the infant has died of natural causes. Neonatal deaths were extremely common in China at this date, as they were throughout the world.
- Whatever thoughts may be passing through the emperor's mind when he first gazes upon his dead child, the empress Wang is initially cleared of the suspicions. Over time, however, the emperor comes to side with Wu and comes to believe that his wife is complicit in murder.

- Then, the empress Wang and her close friend—the number-one concubine—are accused of attempting to murder the emperor. When the supposed plot is discovered, Wang is unceremoniously stripped of her title and immediately placed under house arrest.
- It is now December 12, 655, and the emperor Gaozong is about to make a decision that will further unsettle his court, with long-lasting repercussions for the empire. He announces that he will marry his new number-one concubine, Wu Chou, who is now 31 years old. We don't have testimony as to how this news is received at the imperial court, or indeed elsewhere in the land, but it's easy enough to imagine the gossip.
- Some accounts suggest that Gaozong is a weak and vacillating emperor, whom Wu now has eating out of her hand. But that testimony may be intended merely to discredit her further. If we are to believe what we read, Wu is a monster with an insatiable sexual appetite, which she gratifies by having affairs with supporters. But there is no denying that for a woman in feudal China to grasp power the way Wu has done, she must be more than a "charming lady," as the late Emperor Taizhong described her.

### **Wu Zetian's Rule and Legacy**

- Within a decade of the former lowly concubine's ambitious marriage, many of the trappings of power pass into her hands, primarily as a result of Gaozong's failing health. He suffers from a chronic illness that leaves him partially paralyzed. Even when his health is relatively unimpaired, he is probably no match for this enterprising temptress-turned-empress.
- As long as Gaozong is alive, Wu Chou demonstrates considerable tact. She doesn't try to overshadow her husband nor forcibly wrest the reins of power from him. By all accounts, the pair have a strong conjugal bond and make a good team, sharing four sons and two daughters. They come to be known as the "Two Sages," which suggests that in time they're accorded a degree of public acceptance.



- Their marriage lasts for nearly 30 years, until the emperor's death in 683, at the age of 55. After Gaozong's death, following 34 years of rule, Wu first becomes the empress dowager (a widow whose title derives from her late husband) and then the empress regnant, meaning that she commands as much power as an emperor even though she is not accorded a commensurate title.
- Gaozong is first succeeded by a succession of sons, until the year 690, when Wu Chou orders the last of his sons to abdicate, whereupon she proclaims herself sovereign ruler of China. She now takes the name Wu Zetian, which means Wu "The Pattern of Heaven." She is 66 years old—China's first and last female emperor—and she will rule alone for the next 15 years.
- Wu Zetian's imperial legacy is impressive. She moves the capital from Chang'an to Luoyang, about 600 miles north of present-day Shanghai. She does this partly for political reasons, but it is also an intelligent and far-sighted economic decision, because the new capital lies close to important trade routes to the south.
- In government, Wu Zetian creates a meritocracy by instituting a program whereby the bureaucracy comes to be filled with appointments made on the basis of formal exams, followed by interviews. This means that she surrounds herself with scholars rather than aristocrats, and this in turn reduces, if not wholly eliminates, the cronyism and nepotism that had characterized the court previously.
- Wu permits her ministers to criticize her, even to ridicule her for her dependency on omens. At the same time, she is utterly ruthless. She institutes a highly efficient secret police force. She encourages informants to report on her rivals. By one estimate, she exiles or executes or forces to commit suicide 80 percent of her chief ministers.
- Wu also improves the lot of peasants, by reducing their taxes and passing measures to increase productivity. She establishes

almshouses for the sick and poor. She encourages the arts, including literature, thereby paving the way for an artistic efflorescence under her successors.

- To a limited degree, she elevates the status of women. She passes a decree that increases the period of mourning owed to a deceased mother so that it equals that due to a father. She states that rulers should watch over their people as mothers watch over their children. We should not, however, see her as an early feminist. Some historians see her as deeply conservative.
- In the realm of spirituality, Wu Zetian promotes Buddhism, which was introduced into China from India along the Silk Road about 400 years earlier. The religion, or philosophy, becomes the dominant one practiced by the Chinese people. At the same time, Wu deftly avoids alienating devotees of the other great teaching movements in China, including Taoism and Confucianism.
- She promotes good relations between the indigenous Chinese known as the Han and the many ethnic minorities that populate her empire. She promotes non-Han generals to defend her empire. She avoids costly foreign wars. She leaves China secure and intact after facing a number of external threats.
- A few months before Wu Zetian's death in 705 at the age of 81, she is forced to abdicate by her eldest son, Zhongzong, whom she exiled years before. Wu now renounces the title of emperor, as well as her status as a living god. By the end of her life, she has become extremely superstitious and increasingly under the control of a small set of advisors and flatterers. It probably doesn't take much to persuade her to go quietly.
- Wu Zetian is today buried beside her beloved Gaozong. While Wu Zetian's reign is but a moment in 3,000 years of Chinese history, her career endures as a striking conjunction of the woman, the means, and the moment.

## Suggested Reading

Clements, *The Chinese Empress Who Schemed, Seduced, and Murdered Her Way to Become a Living God*.

Fitzgerald, *The Empress Wu*.

Rothschild, *Wu Zhao*.

## Questions to Consider

1. As a Chinese subject and contemporary of Wu Zetian, what would have been your assessment of her reign?
2. Whom do you admire more: Theodora or Wu Zetian?

# Muhammad's Awakening and Escape

## Lecture 19

**T**he year is 622. We're in Mecca in Saudi Arabia. And our interest is in a prosperous businessman named Muhammad. Muhammad has just received a death threat that will change his life and, in time, shape the future of humankind. Like Jesus of Nazareth more than half a millennium earlier, Muhammad has become the subject of rumor, suspicion, and fear. The life of Muhammad leaves many unanswered questions, and his legacy is a complicated and fraught one.

### The Life of Muhammad

- Muhammad is the son of a widow who was raised by nomadic Bedouins in the desert. Life was extremely tough for him because he started from nothing. He acquired wealth by leading caravans across the blistering desert and by marrying a businesswoman named Khadija, with whom he has had five daughters and a son (who has died by the time we encounter Muhammad).
- Muhammad has acquired a reputation as someone who is extremely trustworthy, who is capable of dispensing justice, and who has a strong social conscience. He also has a small but devoted group of followers. Twelve years ago, he had a vision that he is the messenger of God. This belief has been growing inside him and among his followers. But so many rumors surround him that a conspiracy is now forming in Mecca.
- Mecca is ruled by a number of tribes, and the most powerful of these is the Quraysh, translated into English as the "Association." Like other tribes, it's a cooperative of clans—sometimes collaborating, sometimes competing. The Association has come around to the opinion that Muhammad represents a serious threat to its business interests and that he must be dealt with immediately.

- A few months earlier, some of Muhammad’s followers fled from Mecca, seeking safe haven in a remote agricultural town. But Muhammad resolved to stay. He sees his place in Mecca with his followers. Now he realizes that his life is in danger.
- One of Muhammad’s closest followers is a man named Abu Bakr—Muhammad’s father-in-law—who offers to disguise himself and lie down in Muhammad’s bed this very night, so that when the agents of the Quraysh come to kill him, they will discover only his aide, not the leader.
- With this threadbare plan, Muhammad takes to the desert, relying on his intimate knowledge of the barren countryside that he has safely traversed so many times when escorting caravans and placing his faith in Allah, who has called him to service. Accompanied by a band of loyal followers, he heads toward his mother’s birthplace: the oasis town of Yathrib, to which other followers have already fled.
- Muslims refer to this episode in Muhammad’s life as the Hijrah or Hegira, a word best translated as “flight,” “departure,” or “emigration.” Muhammad’s Hegira is such a fundamental moment in Islamic history that it is used to mark the beginning of the Islamic Era.
- Mecca—where Muhammad was born in 570—is situated in a region known as the Hijaz, or “Barrier,” the coastal stretch of Saudi Arabia bordering on the Red Sea. It’s at the crossroads of trade between the Arabian Peninsula, the Mediterranean, East Africa, and South Asia. Most people living in the Arabian Peninsula at the time are polytheists. However, a number of Jews have settled in the region as well, but we don’t know how or when they arrived.

### **Muhammad’s Biography**

- In contrast to Jesus, who lived in a culture that had a tradition of documenting historical events, Muhammad lives in a culture whose history is preserved primarily through poetry that is transmitted orally. To make matters worse, the Sunnis and Shiites—the two

principal religious belief systems that dominate Islam today—will tell different versions of his life.

- What we know of Muhammad's life is preserved through oral tradition passed down from generation to generation and not written down until several centuries after his death. Some of it derives from the Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam. Oral accounts, written down centuries after the event, are not particularly reliable from the perspective of a Western historian, but they're all that we have.
- The Arab historian Ibn Ishaq will write the first biography of Muhammad more than a hundred years after the Prophet's death. His primary focus is on Muhammad's *spiritual* journey. This is reflected by the Arabic term for a biography: *sira*, which means "journey." A *sira* is very different from a modern biography. It presents its subject as manifesting a spiritual life but not an inner life. The portrait that emerges is strongly influenced by the author's religious viewpoint.
- We don't have a surviving copy of Ibn Ishaq's *sira*, apart from a few fragments. What we have instead is an edited version by an Egyptian scholar named Ibn Hisham, who lives a century later yet. Ibn Hisham's edition of Ibn Ishaq's *sira* is the most influential biography that has come down to us, yet it remains highly controversial. Although the *sira* concentrates on his life as a prophet, it also tells us a great deal about his life that has nothing to do with his identity as the Prophet.
- In time, Muhammad becomes quite wealthy, leading caravans across the Arabian Desert. His job gives him the opportunity to meditate a great deal. In 610, in a cave near Mecca on Mount Hira, Muhammad has a vision of the angel Gabriel, who is mentioned in both the Old Testament—or Hebrew Bible—and the New Testament. In the Hebrew Bible, he appears to the prophet Daniel, and in the New Testament, he appears to the Virgin Mary, foretelling the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. Now, however, the angel

tells Muhammad that Muhammad is to be the messenger or prophet of God. Muhammad is about 40 years old at the time.

- Sunni and Shia Muslim interpretations of this event vary. The traditional Sunni version holds that Muhammad is surprised by Gabriel's appearance and that he later goes home to Khadija, where he shares the story of what has happened to him. He even contemplates taking his own life because he believes that he's insane or possessed by demons. The Shias, by contrast, hold that Muhammad is expecting Gabriel when the visit takes place and that he welcomes him in rapture.
- These two different versions reflect the differing accounts of Muhammad's life that have come down to us through Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham. Ibn Hisham omits the story of Muhammad contemplating suicide after this revelation, because it does not fit with his image of the Prophet, so, he concludes, it could not possibly be true.
- As the months go by, Gabriel visits Muhammad again, commanding him to present himself as God's messenger. Whether or not Muhammad is initially plagued with self-doubt, he now embraces his role as Prophet. He invites members of his tribe, the Banu Hashim, to his house and explains what has happened. The religious belief he is promoting is to be based on submission—that is the meaning of the word "Islam."
- Khadija believes Muhammad, but the only other family member who takes him seriously is his 10-year-old cousin Ali. Soon, however, the revelation from the angel to the Prophet will take root in the hearts of a small band of men and women and dispose them to abandon their sinful ways.

### **Muhammad's Escape**

- In the year 622, Muhammad and his followers face persecution in Mecca from the ruling tribe, the Quraysh. A major gripe the Quraysh have with Muhammad is that he is undermining their economy. One

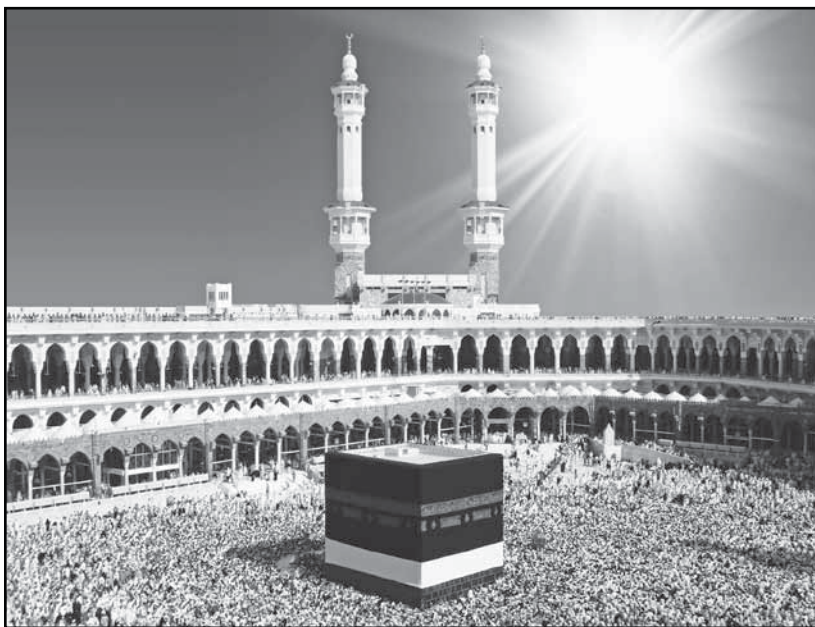
source of profit to them is that they provide services to the pilgrims who journey to Mecca from all across the Arabian Peninsula.

- By the time Abu Bakr's ruse of sleeping in Muhammad's bed is discovered, the Prophet has escaped. Abu Bakr himself disappears and later joins Muhammad, who has been hiding in a cave for three days while a massive search unfolds.
- Muhammad and his supporters reach Yathrib on September 20. When they do so, villagers flood out of the town to greet them. Muhammad requests that a mosque be built at the very place where his camel first kneels down to rest. And it is here that his followers establish the first place of worship for Muslims: on Day One, Year One in the Muslim calendar, the official birthday of Islam.
- Eventually, Muhammad takes control of Yathrib, which becomes the first Muslim town. He names his followers the *umma*, the unifying term for all those who join in the worship of Allah. Henceforth, Yathrib comes to be known as Medina, meaning "The City of the Prophet."
- Muhammad's first task is to build a community. He clearly believes in consensus, albeit under one-man rule. If there is a disagreement, the matter is to be referred to Allah and Muhammad, his messenger. It's a monumental undertaking, because Muhammad is also creating a new belief system—or, rather, a radical monotheistic-reform movement. Among the tenets of Muhammad's movement are an outright rejection of polytheism, as well as the promotion of social values and the eradication of unbelief—if necessary, by military means.
- Over the next 10 years, the *umma* grows in numbers and strength. Muhammad continues to experience revelations, many of them related to the practical organization of society. This doesn't mean that Islam is firmly established, however. There are internal divisions among the *umma*: the *muhajirun*, "those who have undertaken the Hegira," otherwise known as the Companions;



and the *ansar*, the “helpers,” or Medinan believers who offered hospitality to the Companions.

- Although the majority of Medinans embraces the new faith, not all do. Why would Jews and polytheists placidly accept the suspension of their own traditions? On the contrary, they regard Muhammad’s teachings with suspicion—a suspicion that is aggravated by the fact that they are also being asked to transfer political and legal authority to an outsider and upstart.
- Within a year, Muhammad manages to strike a deal with at least some of the Jewish tribes to accept his authority, but it probably takes several years for him to gain ascendancy over all his rivals. This does not happen entirely peaceably. His relations with the Jews actually worsen over time; many are expelled from Medina, while others are massacred.



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Located in Mecca, the Kaaba is considered to be the holiest shrine in Islam.

- And while all of this is going on, Muhammad is still conducting negotiations, striking deals, overseeing property transfers, utilizing his business skills, and advancing his agenda. His rise to power, in other words, is due to a whole raft of personal qualities: his charisma, faith in the religious system he is introducing, trustworthiness, integrity, powers of diplomacy, political shrewdness, and at times ruthlessness. Worldly as well as spiritual qualities played their part in his rise.
- We pass finally to a period of armed conflict characterized at first by attempts from the Meccans to eradicate the new community that formed in Medina. This culminates in the siege of Medina by the Meccans in 627. The Meccans fail and lose considerable power and prestige as a result.
- The following year, Muhammad rides unopposed into Mecca at the head of an army of 10,000. Upon his arrival, he orders his followers to destroy the pagan idols housed in the shrine known as the Kaaba, the cube-shaped building that was the sanctuary of the pagan god Hubal. The Kaaba becomes the holiest shrine in Islam. Today, when Muslims perform the *hajj*, or pilgrimage, to Mecca (which all Muslim men are required to do at least once in their life), they walk around the Kaaba seven times.
- By 630, Muhammad has gained control of all Arabia. Two years later, he undertakes his last pilgrimage and delivers his last message in the Valley of Arafat, beneath a granite hill east of Mecca. When he returns to Medina, the Angel of Death comes to visit him. Recognizing the apparition, Muhammad says, "Death, carry out your orders." He dies on June 7, 632, at the age of 62.

## Suggested Reading

Armstrong, *Islam*.

———, *Muhammad*.

Brown, *Muhammad*.

Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What were the main reasons why Muhammad was successful in establishing a community of believers?
2. What qualities does Muhammad share with Jesus?

# Charles Martel Defeats the Muslims

## Lecture 20

**T**he Muslim invaders have come a very long way from their native homes on the Arabian Peninsula. Most recently, they've pressed north from Spain, hacking and pillaging as they go. Among their ranks are Berber tribesmen from North Africa who are recent converts to Islam. Some Christian mercenaries also fight with the Muslims, because there aren't enough Arabs to serve in the army, which has grown so large because of their conquests. The Arabs have been able to make it thus far because they haven't faced much serious opposition. And now their army is camped between Tours and Poitiers in western central France, in the Loire Valley.

### The Franks and the Muslims

- It's October 25 in the year 732, and a battle is about to take place between the Arab-led Muslims and the Christian Franks. The Franks inhabit modern-day France, Holland, and the northern bank of the River Rhine in Germany.
- Although the Franks refer to themselves as a kingdom, they're more like a confederation of tribes. They're the descendants of Germanic peoples who infiltrated the Roman Empire during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries and who were Christianized in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. They are under the leadership of a formidable and accomplished general named Charles Martel—"Charles the Hammer."
- The Muslims are under the command of a man named Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi, the *wali*, or governor, of Al-Andalus, the region that comprises Spain, Portugal, and southern France. The two sides have been eyeing each other—up and down their encampments—for seven full days.
- After the conquest of Mecca a century earlier, in the year 630, the prophet Muhammad began waging war against the adjacent tribes that lived on the Arabian Peninsula. By the time of his death in 632,

Muhammad had begun to unite the Arabs into a single state, with a collective sense of identity and a centralized governmental system for the first time in their history.

- In the century after the Prophet's death, the Muslims twice fail to take Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. But Kabul—the capital of present-day Afghanistan—does fall to their forces, and so do Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan. And the Muslims conquer Syria, Palestine, and Egypt.
- Jerusalem itself is in Muslim hands by 637 and becomes the third holiest city in the Islamic world after Mecca and Medina. That's because it is where Muhammad is said to have been taken up to heaven. As a result of the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem, the Jews are permitted to return to the city for the first time since their expulsion by the Romans nearly 500 years earlier.
- As the Muslims move west, they take Carthage, Tripoli, and Tangier. Then, they cross into Europe via the Strait of Gibraltar in 712 or



© Photos.com/Thinkstock.

**Charles Martel, who ruled the Frankish realm from 715 to 741 C.E., defeated the Muslims in 732.**

713. The Muslim general Tariq ibn Ziyad is the first Umayyad military leader who crosses from Africa into Spain. Umayyad is the name of the caliphate. A caliphate is an Islamic state ruled by a caliph, or “successor,” to Muhammad. The caliph is considered to be the state’s supreme religious and political leader.

- The Muslims come to gain control of most of the Iberian Peninsula, which previously had been a Christian kingdom established by the Visigoths. And some of the Arab conquerors settle permanently in what comes to be known as Al-Andalus, roughly corresponding to modern Andalusia, Galicia, Castile and León, Aragon, and Portugal.
- The Visigothic kingdom survived until about 711, when the invading forces of Umayyad Muslims killed their last king, Roderic, in the Battle of Guadalete. By 720, the Army of Believers has breached the Pyrenees Mountains that separate Spain from France, and it is pressing northward into the kingdom of the Franks. Along the way, the Muslims plunder churches and monasteries and take many prisoners. They appear to be unstoppable.
- At Toulouse in 721, however, the Muslims suffer a massive defeat at the hands of Duke Odo of Aquitaine—“Odo the Great”—when they invade his duchy. This battle is a total disaster for the Muslims. This is the first major reversal the Arabs have suffered since they began moving north into the Iberian Peninsula.

### The Spread of Islam

- The 8<sup>th</sup> century is often described as part of the Dark Age of history. It certainly isn’t dark for the Islamic world, which enjoys a period of economic development and cultural creativity. Arabic replaces Aramaic in Syria and Palestine and Coptic in Egypt as the most widely spoken language. There is tolerance toward both Christians and Jews, who are incorporated into society without prejudice. For non-Muslim Westerners, thoughts about the advance of Islam in the century after Muhammad’s death are nonetheless deeply problematic.

- There are three main reasons why such a small and militarily insignificant group of people from an obscure corner of the Arabian Peninsula has made such giant strides since the prophet Muhammad first proclaimed the faith. First, the Arabs have adapted their arms, armor, and military organization from the Byzantines, who were very advanced in military affairs. Second, the empires the Muslims attack or conquer have largely exhausted themselves. Third, the Arabs are fired up with profound religious fervor and zeal.
- Had you been a soldier serving in the Muslim army, you might well believe that you are fulfilling the bidding of the Prophet; likewise, you might interpret your success as a reward from Allah for having performed his will.
- It would be wrong, however, to infer that conquest was necessarily the Muslims' primary objective at this time or that these wars were fought solely to spread Islam throughout the world. Nor should we be thinking in terms of a simple model of violent conquest. There is very little evidence of cities being burned and destroyed by the Muslim Army of Believers.
- What happens in most places is the imposition of a political hegemony, with the requirement of subjected peoples to pay taxes. But the Muslims don't insist that all peoples they subjugate convert to Islam, although many undoubtedly do so voluntarily. Many of them are monotheists already—whether Christians or Jews or Zoroastrians—so they are probably content to leave the local belief systems mostly intact, as long as they make a commitment to live righteously.

### **Charles Martel and Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi**

- The defeat at Toulouse is only a temporary setback for the Muslims. But it is enough to give Charles Martel, king of the Franks, time to prepare for the invasion that is bound to come. Nine years later, the caliph Hisham dismisses the region's unpopular governor and sends an emissary to consult the Muslim army in Al-Andalus about who his replacement should be. According to the historian

Alexander Mikaberidze, the troops favor Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi on the grounds that he is “pious, honest, generous and brave.” The religious establishment also supports him.

- By 720, Abdul Rahman’s army is back on the offensive. It acquires cities along the Mediterranean coast and throughout southern France. Finally, it arrives close to Tours in the Loire Valley—11 years after the first Battle of Toulouse.
- Having burned down the church of Saint Hilaire in Poitiers, Abdul Rahman’s men are now poised to plunder the church of Saint Martin in Tours. And it is here that the Muslim invaders find their way barred.
- Charles Martel’s name comes from the Latin word *martellus*, meaning “hammer.” And a massive Frankish hammer under Martel’s command blocks Abdul Rahman’s advance. He is sometimes seen as the dominant figure of Western Europe during the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century—and with justification. He helps to unify the Franks and establish their authority in Francia by waging war against the Germanic peoples seeking to invade his kingdom: the Alemanni, the Frisians, and the Saxons.
- This is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that Charles was by no means obviously destined for greatness, being the illegitimate son of a courtesan in the Franks’ palace. So, he has had to win his way to power by political intrigue. Charles isn’t a king. He is officially “mayor of the palace,” or majordomo. This is during a period when the Frankish king is little more than a figurehead; the mayor makes all the important decisions.

### The Battle of Tours

- In 732, the Muslims are on their way again. They have inflicted serious revenge on Duke Odo of Aquitaine—who thrashed them so heavily a decade or so ago—near Bordeaux, and that defeat has sent Odo fleeing to Charles for help. Charles agrees on the condition that Odo submits to his authority and incorporates the remnant of



his force into his army. The imminent battle, fought about halfway between Poitiers and Tours—sometimes called the Battle of Poitiers—is one of the defining military contests in world history.

- Although there's no contemporary description of the battle, we know that the Frankish force consists mainly of infantrymen, whereas the Muslims depend chiefly on cavalry. The Franks have some cavalry, too, but as far as we can tell, they dismount once they get to the battlefield and fight as infantry. Logic might suggest that the cavalry would get the better of the infantry. But that is not what happens.
- The Franks don't yield an inch; the Muslim cavalry are incapable of piercing the Christian ranks. At the same time, the Muslim force presents an easy target to the enemy whenever it gets close enough or when the invaders turn their backs in retreat. And when the two sides engage in close combat, it is easier for the Frank infantryman on the ground to strike at the Muslim cavalry rider, or at his horse, than it is for the horseman to strike at the infantryman. Once the horseman is down, he stands very little chance of defending himself.
- In the end, what probably determines the outcome is the death of Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi, the Arab general. One report puts the number of dead on the Frankish side at less than 1,000, compared with tens of thousands of Arabs.
- The day after the battle, Charles Martel draws up his men in battle line, expecting to face a renewed attack. Although he has not sustained heavy losses, he is anxiously awaiting reinforcements. The fact that the Arabs have lost their leader might mean that they will fight all the more fiercely.
- But he and the Franks await the Arab enemy in vain. Eventually, Charles orders his men to stand down and inspect the enemy encampment. When they do so, they find that it is completely deserted. The Muslims have slunk off in the night, leaving behind

all their plunder. Even their dead are unburied at the place where they have fallen.

- While in the past scholars have tended to regard Charles's victory at the Battle of Tours as the salvation of the Western world by saving Europe from becoming an outcrop of Islam, they're less inclined to do so today. There's greater recognition that the Arabs would not have had the military strength to press on further into Normandy and then across the English Channel into Britain and that even had they won the Battle of Tours, they wouldn't have been able to consolidate their conquest of northern France.
- Five years later, Charles will defeat the Arab invaders again at Avignon—and the next year at Corbières—although the Muslims will maintain control of Narbonne, their principal fortress in southwest France, for 27 years after the Battle of Tours, stonewalling Charles when he tries to take it. And by that point, the Arab dream of a united caliphate has disintegrated in civil war.
- In 750, a new caliphate emerges, the Abbasid Dynasty, which establishes itself in Baghdad. Members of the previous Umayyad Dynasty, which ruled from Damascus, are hunted down, although one survives to rule from Córdoba in Spain.
- It is left to Charles's son, Pippin the Short, to recover Narbonne in 759 and drive the Arabs back across the Pyrenees once and for all. And when the Arabs eventually leave, Aquitaine and southwest France come permanently under Frankish control, paving the way for another great leader of the Franks: Charles Martel's grandson, Charlemagne.

### Suggested Reading

Crowley, ed., "The Dark Ages Made Lighter."

Hanson, "Poitiers, October 11, 732."

Nicolle, *Poitiers AD 732*.

## Questions to Consider

1. Why was Islam able to expand in such a short time?
2. What are the chief reasons for Charles Martel's victory at Tours?

# Culture Shock! Travels of Ibn Fadlan

## Lecture 21

**T**he king of the Volga Bulgars, Almis, likes to think of himself as a man of great power and importance. King Almis is a recent convert to Islam, and he is trying to establish his authority over a number of unruly tribes in an untamed expanse of Central Asia within modern-day Russia. He also wants to secure his independence from a neighboring people called the Khazars, a seminomadic Turkic tribe that constantly encroaches on his affairs. In other words, Almis has a lot to deal with at home and abroad.

### The Bulgars

- It's May 922. We're at the Volga Bulgars' royal court. A visiting delegation, known as an embassy, has come to visit Almis from Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Abbasid Caliphate is the second of two great Muslim dynasties. It is named for Al-Abbas, an uncle of the prophet Muhammad, whose clan overthrew the first Muslim dynasty, the Umayyad Caliphate, in 750.
- The two parties, in the same room together, represent two cultures that are worlds apart. The Volga Bulgars have recently converted to Islam, so at least the two have that much in common. But the Bulgars don't know much about Islamic observance or Islamic law. They are warriors foremost; they're little familiar with the niceties of civilized existence. They are probably dressed in animal skins, their hair unkempt and greasy.
- By contrast, the Arab ambassadors are wearing exquisite silk gowns, their hair carefully tended and their nails manicured. They're out of their element, to put it mildly. Having set off a year earlier, they've covered a distance of 2,500 miles across the Kazakh Steppe. And most of them want to get back to the mother ship as soon as possible. But they're also determined to make a good impression. And they're certainly not going to be cowed by the Bulgar king.

- Ibn Fadlan, who will write an account of this journey, takes a calculated gamble before beginning to recite from the letter. He orders the entire Bulgar court—including the king—to stand. He does so to indicate that the caliph is a greater man in the eyes of the world than Almis is. Almis apparently obeys. And because the Bulgar king has a big, fat paunch—as Ibn Fadlan carefully notes—this probably puts his host under a bit of a strain.
- Ibn Fadlan has the eye of a trained anthropologist for observing cultural differences. He has a finely tuned legalistic mind, and he's a stickler for adhering to the letter of the law in religious observance. The caliph has chosen him for his legal expertise, because one of the main purposes of the embassy is to provide an account of Islamic law to the recent converts.
- Baghdad in 922—the year of the embassy—is one of the largest, most sophisticated and civilized, and wealthiest cities in the world. Baghdad was founded in 762 as the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. Known as the Round City because of its shape, it stands on the River Tigris and was chosen because of its plentiful supply of water. Under the Abbasids' predecessor, the Umayyad Caliphate had been based in Damascus.
- Science, especially medicine, advances under the Abbasids. Mathematics flourishes during this period, too. The works of many classical authors would otherwise have been lost had they not been translated into Arabic in Baghdad. So, the Arabs play a key part in preserving Greek culture and transmitting it to the West.
- Aside from the high achievements of Islamic culture, Baghdad during the 10<sup>th</sup> century has many of the creature comforts and facilities that we today would consider essential to life in a bustling city, including bazaars, libraries, and ornamental gardens. A distinctive architectural feature of the city is the prevalence of Arab tiles with intricate mathematical patterns.

- By comparison, the Volga Bulgars live in rather basic conditions, on the east bank of the River Volga. They migrated north to this territory sometime between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. We don't know the date or the motivation behind the move because of the lack of literary or archaeological sources. Some of the most important linguistic clues as to the language they speak come from Volga Bulgar tomb inscriptions dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, which are written in Arabic but contain some Turkic words and sentences.
- Another group of Bulgars has moved out of the region a while back and taken possession of the territory that is known today as Bulgaria. Those Bulgars become Christians, whereas the Volga Bulgars converted to Islam to gain independence from the regional power: the Khazars, a Turkic people who flourish from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- They're also multiconfessional—that is, some are Christians, some are Jews, and some are Muslims. The three Abrahamic religions—so named because all three trace their roots back to the patriarch Abraham—are at this moment all in stiff competition with one another.
- The Khazars hold sway over southern Russia, eastern Ukraine, northwestern Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, to which they later give their name. Despite their tolerance of Islam, they have fought frequent battles against the caliphate and, in so doing, halted the advance of Islam northward. Learning of the antagonism between the caliphate and the Khazars, the Volga Bulgars have seized the opportunity to advance their interests by allying themselves with the caliphate.

### King Almis's Requests

- In his letter to the Arab caliph, King Almis has asked for three things: money to build a fort so that his people can resist the Khazars, advice about how to educate his people in the Islamic faith, and instructions on how to build a mosque.

- In Baghdad, Al-Muqtadir decides to agree to all of his requests. This isn't a purely goodwill gesture, however. Al-Muqtadir has his own political agenda. He's looking for allies to strengthen his own grip on power.
- Islam is riven by feuding between two rival groups, as they are today: the Sunnis, who believe that the line of descent from the prophet Muhammad has passed through a close companion and the first convert, Abu Bakr; and the Shias, who believe that the line of descent passed through Muhammad's son-in-law Ali. The Abbasids at this time are trying to placate both.
- There are other reasons why Al-Muqtadir is tempted to look outside his borders for any support he can find. He's deeply unpopular with his own people. In addition, the Islamic Empire, though still extremely powerful and wealthy, is at something of a low ebb, having lost control of northern Africa. It's no longer expanding across the globe, as it had been 200 years earlier, when it was knocking on the doors of France.
- At the court of the Bulgar king in 922, Ibn Fadlan is ordering the fat man to stand up as he reads him the caliph's letter. Three days later, once all the formalities have been dispensed with, King Almis holds a private audience with Ibn Fadlan and demands the money he has been promised in the letter—4,000 dinars—to build the Bulgar fort. And it is here that things get a little bit tricky.
- Ibn Fadlan explains that some Christians along the way have stolen the money. When the king hears this, he is understandably apoplectic and accuses Ibn Fadlan of stealing the money himself. To compensate for the loss of money, Ibn Fadlan produces a number of gifts, including an elaborately decorated saddle, banners, and silk robes. But these do nothing to defuse the tension; Almis is not impressed.

- What happens as a result of the meeting isn't recorded. We don't know whether Almis eventually gets the money he so desperately wants or whether any benefit from the embassy accrues to Al-Muqtadir. All we know is that the king releases Ibn Fadlan and lets him go on his way unimpeded.

## The Rus

- The delegation does not immediately head back to Baghdad, however. Ibn Fadlan is fascinated by the customs of different peoples, so he takes time out to visit what today is the city of Kazan, alongside the River Volga. He calls this people the Rusiyyah or Rus, a name that is cognate with "Russia."
- The Rus spark Ibn Fadlan's curiosity, and his description of their customs occupies a major part of his journal. Some scholars think that they were Scandinavians, possibly even Vikings. However, the customs of the people whom Ibn Fadlan describes are not consistent with what we know of Viking practices in their native Sweden. We don't know who the Rus are, ethnically speaking.
- At the beginning of his account, Ibn Fadlan says, "I've never seen a people with more perfect physiques than theirs." He then compares the Rus to palm trees—fair and reddish. But it soon becomes clear that Ibn Fadlan finds the Rus pretty revolting. In fact, he describes them as "the filthiest of all of Allah's people." They are covered in tattoos "from the tips of their toes to the neck," he writes. They live communally, 10 or 20 in a single dwelling.
- They don't wash their hands after eating, they don't clean themselves after urinating or defecating, and they don't refresh themselves when they are in a state of ritual impurity following sexual intercourse—all of which is contrary to how devout Muslims, who put considerable emphasis on ritual purity, are instructed to conduct themselves.



- Ibn Fadlan does what ethnographers from the time of the Greeks onward have done: He defines his own culture (the urbanized and “advanced” culture of Islam) in terms of its opposite (a seminomadic culture with limited material resources). Although he obviously deplores certain Rus practices and believes in the superiority of Islamic culture and religion, he sees estimable qualities in his odd hosts, as well.
- We can safely assume that Ibn Fadlan gets back to Baghdad because his journal has survived. But we don’t know how he is received by the caliph or what the caliph thinks about his diplomatic initiative—whether he is satisfied with what comes of it or not.
- In any event, the Abbasid Caliphate continues to decline over the next 300 years, until Baghdad is taken by the grandson of Genghis Khan in 1258. The Mongol victory sounds the death knell to a single unified Islamic state in the Middle East.
- Is Ibn Fadlan’s encounter first with the Volga Bulgars and later with the Rus of any real importance? Does it change the course of world history? It’s possible that a line of communication is now opened up between the Middle East and Central Asia. However, like many things in the story of the Bulgars and the Rus, we don’t know much for certain. Encounters between peoples of different cultures have occurred throughout history and often define the boundaries we record, read, and discuss.

### Suggested Reading

Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*.

Flowers, *Ibn Fadlan’s Travel-Report*.

Frye, *Ibn Fadlan’s Journey to Russia*.

Gordon, *When Asia Was the World*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What do we learn about the world in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century from Ibn Fadlan's account of his travels?
2. What is Ibn Fadlan's attitude toward non-Muslims?

# Vladimir Smashes the Idols of the Rus

## Lecture 22

The year is 987 or 988. We've arrived in the coastal city of Kherson, in southern Ukraine, for the baptism of Vladimir, the Grand Duke of Kiev, who has been an active pagan up until this point. The Byzantine emperor, Basil II, has agreed to give his sister, Princess Anna, in marriage to Vladimir—an alliance that Vladimir hopes would strengthen his control over his unruly realm—on the condition that Vladimir converts to Christianity. If the grand duke converts, that means that all of his subjects will necessarily follow suit. But it's hardly likely that Vladimir's pagan subjects, known as the Rus, will abandon the worship of idols without objection.

### Vladimir

- Vladimir—also known as “Vladimir the Great”—has been the grand duke of Kiev, the capital of modern-day Ukraine, for eight years now. As the illegitimate son of the previous duke of Kiev, he has had to wrestle for the throne by fighting off the claim of a half brother. He did so not only by usurping the throne from his sibling, but also by treacherously murdering him.
- From a moral standpoint, Vladimir doesn't have much to recommend him, at least not before he converts to Christianity. He is, or was, a polygamist. The Russian Primary Chronicle—which was compiled in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, just over a century after Vladimir's death—paints a highly unflattering picture of the grand duke before his conversion. It claims that in the first years of his reign, Vladimir actively promotes paganism—the worship of many gods—and even tolerates human sacrifice.
- While Christianity has been around for nearly a millennium by the time Vladimir comes to the throne in 972, it has not yet reached its zenith. In Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, paganism still flourishes.

- We don't have any written sources for Slavic paganism before the arrival of the Christians in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, but it's clear that it was primarily animistic—that is, Slavic pagans worshiped spirits, or *animae*, which are believed to control rivers, fields, woods, the household, the stables, and so forth. They also worshiped the spirits of their ancestors.
- Vladimir is not the first of the Rus to become Christian. Many of the Rus had adopted Christianity following the conversion of the Bulgarians in 864. So, Christianity has had its devotees long before the 980s, when Vladimir embraces the faith.



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**Vladimir the Great, grand duke of Kiev, converted to Christianity in the 980s C.E.**

- None of our sources suggests that Vladimir has an epiphany at the time when he embraces Christianity. On the contrary, he embarks on an “Investigation of the Faiths,” as scholars dub it. According to the Primary Chronicle, Vladimir lets it be known that he is on the lookout for a new religion. In response, he receives ambassadors from Byzantine Christians, Jewish Khazars, Muslim Bulgars, and Germans representing the pope. After hearing from each in turn, Vladimir sends his own ambassadors to the homelands of the different groups to find out more about their practices.
- We don't know precisely what motivates Vladimir's conversion, because he doesn't write anything down. But quite aside from his desire to ally himself with the Byzantine emperor, adopting Christianity is a way of entering the modern world at the end of

the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium—and of being on the right side of history. So, Vladimir settles for Greek Orthodox Christianity.

### **Basil II's Proposal**

- It wasn't a foregone conclusion that Vladimir would embrace Byzantine Christianity, headed by the emperor Basil II. The emperor is not only a great general but also a very capable administrator, and he possesses considerable powers of persuasion, whereas Vladimir is more accustomed to get his way using violent means. And it is he who makes the initial diplomatic approach to Vladimir.
- Basil's goal is to stabilize the western frontier of the Byzantine Empire. He also wants help in fighting off claimants to the imperial throne. Basil's request for assistance represents a potentially great opportunity for Vladimir, who views an alliance with Byzantium as a way to strengthen his control over his realm and increase his political standing. Vladimir is a dodgy claimant to the grand dukedom, and an alliance with Basil will help him establish himself as the grand duke.
- As a matter of expediency, Vladimir is more than ready to accept Basil II's proposal of an alliance. The problem for Basil II is that things are heating up. Although Basil has ousted one pretender to the imperial throne, Bardas Skleros, another—called Bardas Phokas—is preparing to launch an attack. So, Basil agrees, on the condition that Vladimir sends 6,000 mercenaries to help him deal with the problem.

### **Anna and Vladimir**

- Princess Anna is of delicate and refined sensibility and is used to an extremely sophisticated lifestyle. She has probably never met a pagan in her life and undoubtedly has the worst image of them, especially as to their treatment of women. To make matters worse, Vladimir is a famed womanizer, and reports of his sexual excesses undoubtedly have made their way across the Black Sea from Kiev to Byzantium.

- Basil undoubtedly had to use all of his powers of persuasion to get his sister Anna to agree to the match, claiming that the future of the Byzantine Empire now depended on her. In effect, she is a pawn to cement the political alliance—the fate of so many women throughout history.
- In the end, Anna agrees. But for some reason, Basil still delays handing his sister over to Vladimir. Eventually, Vladimir loses his patience. So, he seizes the city of Kherson, which was under Byzantine control at the time. Even so, he acts with commendable restraint. He does not sack the city, and he spares all of his captives.
- It is undoubtedly with considerable trepidation that Anna eventually sails from Constantinople to meet her future husband. The Nikon Chronicle tells us that as soon as Vladimir sets eyes on Anna, he is blinded. All the remedies his doctors recommend prove useless. Anna tells him that the only cure is for him to be baptized. And when the bishop of Kherson performs the baptismal rite, his sight is miraculously restored, whereupon he declares, “I have seen the true God.” Immediately after the sacrament of baptism has been performed, the wedding takes place.
- History does not record how the pair fares in their married life. They have one daughter together. But what is clear is that Anna is a considerable force to be reckoned with. Very soon, she is onto his case, eager to undertake the Christianization of the poor pagan Rus.
- And once Vladimir becomes a Christian, he is reformed overnight, according to the official accounts. Vladimir begins building churches, many of them on sites where pagan temples once stood. This is a good way to make the adjustment from paganism to Christianity more palatable for the masses. Vladimir allegedly abolishes torture and capital punishment throughout his realm and acts generously toward beggars and the sick.

## **The Conversion to Christianity**

- One of the most effective ways by which Vladimir promotes his brand of Christianity is by introducing a literary language, Church Slavonic, a language that is never spoken and is solely for liturgical purposes. This is a brilliant move, because it helps to unify the development of Christianity throughout his ethnically diverse realm. It also has the benefit of limiting the influence of the Greek Orthodox Church, which employs Greek. Vladimir also encourages the spread of education. Along with successfully recruiting priests from among the Rus, he also sets up monasteries.
- Even so, the conversion of a whole people does not occur overnight. Moreover, Vladimir doesn't seem to make much attempt to educate his people in the niceties of Christian doctrine. The tens of thousands who undergo baptism under his direction probably know next to nothing about the faith they are made to embrace.
- Yet Vladimir now becomes as ruthless in the suppression of paganism as he had been previously in the suppression of Christianity. To demonstrate his zeal—and perhaps persuade his wife, Anna, that he really has turned the corner—Vladimir orders the smashing of stone images and the sawing of wooden images of local gods. Icons of saints are set up throughout the land in their place.
- Vladimir also orders that the colossal wooden statue of Perun—the god of thunder and lightning—be attached to a horse's tail, dragged down to the Dnieper River, and beaten by 12 men, before being flung into the river. The smashing of idols under the full glare of public scrutiny would seem to be a highly effective way to drive a nail into the coffin of paganism.
- And although many jeer at this, others weep when they see it happen, an indication that polytheism still has a hold over the population. Moreover, it isn't the case that the Christians will deny the existence of the pagan gods henceforth; rather, they will present them as fiends whose objective is to ruin the human race and win it for the Devil.

- After some time, Vladimir dispatches heralds announcing to the inhabitants of Kiev that they are required to undergo baptism in the Dnieper River. Another strategy Vladimir uses to impose Christianity is to take children from the parents of the best families for instruction. This is a not-so-subtle way of ensuring that anyone who might prove recalcitrant can be pressured to toe the line.
- In the south, the population seems to go along with conversion without too much protest. This is not the case throughout the land, however. In Novgorod and provinces to the north, resistance remains much stiffer. Vladimir also dispatches “missionaries” to convert the holdouts—but they aren’t really missionaries. Rather, they consist of a henchman of his backed by a military contingent. Learning of this, a rabble-rouser named Bogomil rallies the locals in defense of the ancestral gods.
- When Vladimir’s men arrive in Novgorod, they find their way barred. It is only when the grand duke’s men threaten to burn down the whole city that the people agree to abandon their former gods, whereupon their wooden idols are burned and the stone idols are smashed. It is from these seeds that the Russian Orthodox Church is born. Yet, not surprisingly, many of Vladimir’s Byzantine allies remain deeply suspicious of the converted Rus.

### The Kievan Rus

- Although Vladimir has committed his forces to Basil II—and campaigned on his behalf in Bulgaria and elsewhere—his army is thought to be in league with the Devil, with the objective of undermining the Byzantine Empire.
- Vladimir is also politically shrewd. Although he has pledged his loyalty to Basil II, he also maintains cordial relations with the pope in Rome. And strengthened by his embrace of Christianity, which now helps him unify his people, Vladimir puts that power to great effect, making himself master of all of modern-day Russia, as well as of a vast area that stretches from southeast Poland to the River Volga.



- By the time of his death, Vladimir will have doubled the size of the area over which he reigns. And today the inhabitants of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine are all happy to claim descent from the Rus. In addition, Vladimir plays a major part in urbanizing his realm, building several new cities, more than one of which he names after himself.
- The Kievan Rus will reach their greatest extent in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and then begin to decline. Yet their fortunes will always be tied to Constantinople, and when Constantinople ultimately declines in commercial importance, so do the Rus. The Mongols eventually overrun their lands in the 1240s.
- Vladimir dies in his mid-50s—in the year 1015—about 26 years after his destruction of the idols. It's good for Christianity that he lives so long because that gives the new religion time to take firm root under his guidance and enforcement, another example of contingency and longevity playing a major role in the direction that history takes.
- About 150 years after Vladimir's final breath, he is made a saint. Although the Russian Orthodox Church today sees Vladimir as its founder, Vladimir was not even a Russian—the Rus were Ukrainians rather than Russians. Yet when the Russian Orthodox Church established itself as autocephalous (fully independent of Byzantium) in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, it appropriated the heritage of Kiev and made Vladimir its national hero.

### Suggested Reading

Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*.

Dvornik, *The Slavs*.

Volkoff, *Vladimir the Russian Viking*.

## Questions to Consider

1. How did practical concerns and private ambitions combine to alter the course of history in the reign of Vladimir?
2. According to what criteria can Vladimir justifiably be considered a saint?

# Charlemagne Saves Leo III, Rogue Pope

## Lecture 23

**C**harlemagne—the king of the Franks—has arrived in Rome, and Pope Leo III is charming him inside the Lateran Palace, the principal residence of the Holy See. It's November 23, 800. Charlemagne has only recently swashbuckled his way across the Alps, at the head of a powerful army, with a number of Frankish bishops in train. He is demonstrating that he is not only a warrior but also a man of God. The people of Rome know that the king of the Franks is in town to lead an important diplomatic mission. But they have no notion of exactly what is about to transpire.

### Charlemagne

- In the more intimate quarters of the Lateran Palace, Pope Leo is going out of his way to do all that he can to charm and ingratiate himself with Charlemagne. He has been building a large, grandiose extension to the palace. But the pope is in a more precarious position than the opulent grounds and elaborate furnishings of his palace might indicate.
- Leo is in danger of losing the papal crown. And there's no doubt that he will do whatever it takes to persuade the king to stand by what may have been a private deal that the two very likely made in secret a year earlier. Now, the hour is nigh. And on Christmas Day, history will take a new turn.
- Charlemagne is the most powerful man in the Western world. His name means Charles the Great. His grandfather, Charles Martel, won the epic Battle of Tours 70 years earlier, thereby stemming the tide of a Muslim advance from the Iberian Peninsula into northern Europe. Charlemagne sees himself as the defender of Christianity in the West. He came to the throne in 768 and has been king of the Franks for more than 30 years.

- Charlemagne oversees a vast realm that includes most of modern-day France, most of Germany, northern Italy, and Austria—most of what we know of as Western Europe, apart from southern Italy and Sicily and the British Isles. And this is the first time since the fall of Rome that the European continent has been under unified rule. Furthermore, unlike the former Roman Empire, the Carolingian Empire is centered in northern Europe rather than on the Mediterranean.



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**Charlemagne, king of the Franks from 768 to 814 C.E., ruled over a vast realm and unified the European continent.**

- The king of the Franks has been able to accomplish all of this because he has an iron will and boundless energy and because he's utterly fearless. He's a warrior king. But he's a remarkable figure in other ways, too. He has overseen a revival of learning, after a period of steady decline that followed the decay of the Roman Empire half a millennium before. He fosters education in monasteries and cathedrals, and he attracts to his court men of learning. In so doing, he brings political and cultural unity to Europe.
- Modern scholars rightly speak of Charlemagne's reign as the Carolingian Renaissance. At the same time, he is almost constantly engaged in warfare. And when he wins—which he generally does—he forces the people whom he conquers (notably the Saxons) to convert to Christianity. If any refuse to convert, he executes them.
- Our best source for Charlemagne is the *Vita Karoli Magni*, or *Life of Charlemagne*, written by a learned monk named Einhard in

814, two or three years after Charlemagne's death. Einhard served Charlemagne in an administrative capacity. It's a court biography and, therefore, is flattering to its subject. But Einhard seems to have been in a position to observe his subject quite closely, because he provides a fairly intimate portrait of him.

### **Pope Leo III's Trial**

- Pope Leo is the former cardinal priest of Santa Susanna in Rome. He is a Roman of common birth and modest family, who has tenaciously and somewhat unexpectedly risen through the Church hierarchy until ascending to the papal throne on December 26, 795.
- As soon as he is elected, Leo sends the keys of the tomb of Saint Peter to Charlemagne and requests that the king send a legate or ambassador to the Holy See. Charlemagne complies, saying that it is his duty to defend the pope—adding that it is the pope's duty, in turn, to pray for the king's victory in war. Since that date five years earlier, Leo's claim to the papal throne has been repeatedly challenged, and he has been charged with perjury and fornication.
- This is a period during which open feuding frequently erupts between supporters of rival claimants to the Holy See. Eighteen months earlier, a mob of armed men laid violent hands on Leo during a procession that was taking place in Rome in honor of San Lorenzo, or Saint Lawrence. They knocked him down, attempted to cut off his tongue and gouge out his eyes.
- Somehow, Leo manages to escape and flees across the Alps. He heads for Paderborn—a river town near natural springs in the modern-day state of North Rhine–Westphalia in Germany—where Charlemagne is establishing a new bishopric, or district under a bishop's control.
- Arriving in Paderborn, Leo throws himself at Charlemagne's mercy, proclaiming that his enemies succeeded at maiming his eyes and tongue, but that a miracle occurred. His eyesight has been restored, and his tongue has grown back. Pope Leo then asks Charlemagne to support his efforts to recover the papal throne.

- History does not record whether Charlemagne believes Leo's claim of miracle cures. But as Western civilization's self-proclaimed defender of Christianity, the king of the Franks feels obligated to come to the aid of this disenfranchised pope.
- Charlemagne sees himself as bound by a document known today as the Symmachean forgeries. The forgeries take their name from Symmachus, an early 6<sup>th</sup>-century pope. In order to bolster Symmachus's claim to the throne—at a time when there were two rival claimants—the Roman Curia, or Senate, forged documents that it claimed had been produced long before.
- The Curia, which is the administrative arm of the Holy See, asserted that a pope—as the successor of Saint Peter—could not be brought to judgment in a court of law, “because the occupant” of the Holy See “cannot be judged by anyone.” The forgeries provided authoritative justification for the papal equivalent of what today we call executive privilege.
- Charlemagne accepts the legitimacy of these forged documents and agrees—very likely with some reluctance—to come to Rome to give judgment. He also provides Leo with a military escort back to Rome, although he doesn't accompany the pope. Instead, he spends the next 18 months visiting various parts of his kingdom. Yet he knows that his presence at Leo's side will ultimately be required.
- When Leo returns to Rome, the populace apparently receives him with great joy. Charlemagne's envoys put his enemies on trial, and when they are unable to establish the pope's guilt or innocence, they imprison them.
- The long delay now gives the pope time to plan for Charlemagne's visit. He knows that he's still in jeopardy. He commissions a spectacular mosaic that depicts Saint Peter handing a papal vestment to Leo—and a military standard to Charlemagne—to adorn the audience chamber of the Lateran Palace. It signals that, in God's eyes, the king of the Franks is on an equal footing with the pope.

- When Leo learns that Charlemagne is at last on his way to Rome, he journeys to the 12<sup>th</sup> milestone outside of the city, accompanied by a large and impressive entourage. This is to signal his immense gratitude to Charlemagne and his expectation that his patron will clear him of criminal charges.
- The declared purpose of Charlemagne's visit is that he will preside over the Vatican Council proceedings that will examine whether there is any substance to the charges brought against the pope. The Council consists of bishops from all over Western Europe, particularly France and Italy. Charlemagne may have no doubts about Leo's culpability, much less about his rascality, but he is concerned to uphold the authority of the papacy.
- The trial turns out to be something of a mockery. Charlemagne, invoking the Symmachean forgeries, pronounces that the Vatican Council has no authority to stand in judgment of a pope. All the Holy Father is required to do to be acquitted is to swear an oath on the Gospels that he is completely innocent, which Leo dutifully does. Charlemagne then condemns his accusers to death, although at Leo's request, he later commutes their sentence to excommunication.

### **Charlemagne's Coronation**

- Leo has gotten from Charlemagne what he wanted. He's been officially absolved of guilt. And the rumor is that he's going to demonstrate his gratitude in some very palpable, papal way. On Christmas morning in the year 800, the Nativity Mass is just now being observed at Old Saint Peter's Basilica, the principal church in the West.
- Leo is conducting the Mass. At a certain point in the service, something extraordinary happens. Charlemagne has been kneeling, and when he rises to his feet, Leo steps forward, places a circlet of gold on his head, and anoints him with the chrism: the holy oil. Charlemagne is being crowned Emperor of the Romans.

- After the crown is placed on Charlemagne's head, everyone—including Pope Leo—bows before him. Einhard tells us that Charlemagne is completely taken aback by the coronation and that he later declares that he would never have set foot in the church had he known beforehand what Leo was planning. This suggests that Charlemagne was not only unprepared but also angry at being crowned.
- Many scholars suspect that Charlemagne and Leo hatched the coronation plan when Leo came to Paderborn in the summer of 799. It would seem to be a fitting *quid pro quo* for services rendered.
- The crown does not give Charlemagne any entitlement to march to Constantinople and assert his authority over the eastern half of the historical Roman Empire, or over the Eastern Church, which is very different from the Church in the West.
- In a broader sense, however, the coronation is absolutely decisive. It solidifies the existence of two distinct churches, one in the Latin West and the other in the Greek East, both as positive affirmation (the coronation) and as negative affirmation (setting them up as counterpoints and future rivals).
- Furthermore, the coronation reinforces a recognition that cultural unity underscores the Latin West just as it does the Greek East. Henceforth, the Eastern and Western emperors will vie with one another, and make competing claims, both to imperial authority and as to which of their Christian traditions is genuine.
- In essence, the seeds of this struggle are taking root at the moment of Charlemagne's crowning, a brilliantly staged and dramatic event. In actuality, this struggle begins just before the coronation, when Charlemagne receives the keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher from the Patriarch of Jerusalem. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is where the body of Christ is said to be buried, so giving the keys of this church to Charlemagne would be of great symbolic importance.



- Not only is Charlemagne's personal prestige increased as a result of the Christmas Day coronation, but the rascally Pope Leo is every bit as much the beneficiary. At the most public moment in this story—the crowning itself—Leo makes it known that it is he alone, the pope, who has the power to raise a mere monarch to the level of emperor. In so doing, he demonstrates the supremacy of papal authority over temporal authority.
- The moment when the crown descends on Charlemagne's head does indeed change history. It not only shores up the papacy, but as the Carolingian Empire includes most of Western Europe, it gives birth to the notion of Europe.
- Charlemagne will spend much of his last years warding off incursions by the Vikings and crushing rebellions, particularly among the Saxons, although he resorts to diplomacy as much as possible to resolve tensions with his neighbors. Charlemagne dies at the age of 71 in January 814—13 years after the coronation. He is succeeded by his only surviving legitimate son, Louis the Pious, whom he crowned the year before his death.
- Leo remains securely on the papal throne until the death of Charlemagne, when his enemies again begin to conspire against him. But Leo lives only two more years.

### Suggested Reading

Barbero, *Charlemagne*.

Wilson, *Charlemagne*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Who was greater: Charlemagne or Alexander the Great?
2. How would you characterize the relationship between Charlemagne and Pope Leo III?

# Urban II Unleashes the First Crusade

## Lecture 24

It's November 27, 1095, and Pope Urban II is about to make an important announcement at the cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption in Clermont in southern France. It's been a rough period for the papacy over the past few centuries. Some of Urban II's predecessors have been deposed, imprisoned, starved to death, and killed in sundry ways. As a consequence, the pope has taken up residence in Avignon—in southeast France—rather than in Rome. But things are looking up. Urban II has successfully defended his position as head of the Christian Church against attempts by a rival and has improved relations between Church and state.

### Pope Urban II

- At the age of 60, Urban is at the height of his powers. He enjoys widespread support among European nobility, and he has made the papacy a power to be reckoned with again. His authority is greatly respected in France, Italy, and Spain at a time when new tensions are bubbling up in such far-flung capitals as Rome, Constantinople, and the holy city of Jerusalem.
- We don't know what Urban's speech is going to be about, but we know that it's going to be momentous. A Church council is in session, and the council's penultimate meeting is under way inside the cathedral, behind locked doors. But the crowd that has gathered to hear the Holy Father has become so large that it cannot fit inside the cathedral. So, his papal throne has been set up on a platform in a field outside the city walls.

### Background

- Jerusalem has been in Muslim hands for three and a half centuries at this time, although until recently the Muslims have not prevented pilgrims of other faiths from visiting the holy city—nor from worshipping at its shrines. Nevertheless, both the Church and the West are deeply offended by Islam's occupation of this holiest of cities.

- Jerusalem—the city at the center of Judaism, the city that played a special role in the life and death of Jesus Christ—is now under Muslim control. It is this circumstance that lies at the root of the looming crisis, although it will be fanned by tales of atrocities perpetrated against the Christians who live under Muslim rule.
- The Christian West faces challenges and crises from other sources, as well. Urban has recently received an urgent appeal for help from Constantinople—from the Byzantine emperor Alexius—who implores him to provide military aid to help defend the Byzantine Church against the heathens.
- The emperor Alexius is eager to win back territory lost to the Seljuk Turks, who only recently have established a competing empire extending from Anatolia in Turkey to modern-day Iran. Indeed, part of the problem in the year 1095 is that pilgrims are no longer able to travel safely through modern-day Turkey on their way to the Holy Land, due to the fact that the Seljuk Turks have taken control of the region. By the time of Pope Urban's address, virtually no Christian pilgrims are able to visit Jerusalem.

### Urban's Speech

- At last, Urban II rises from his throne. He announces that Jerusalem—the most sacred place on Earth—is being defiled by the Seljuk Turks, a people the pope is setting out to demonize. Urban is preparing to pit Christianity against Islam—the followers of Christ against Muslim followers of Muhammad—in a way that is deliberately provocative, even incendiary.
- By rescuing Jerusalem from this “accursed race,” Urban says, we will be fulfilling God's will and preparing for the Second Coming of Christ. And as a reward for our efforts, we are promised forgiveness for our sins. On this day, history has just turned on a dime and lurches in a new direction.
- Jonathan Riley-Smith, a professor of ecclesiastical history at Cambridge University and author of *The First Crusade and the*

*Idea of Crusading*, says that Pope Urban is authorizing “war in his capacity as pope” and inspiring tens of thousands to undertake it—a fact duly recognized by Europe’s military leaders at the time, who write about a mission that they credit Pope Urban with initiating.

- When Urban calls for a holy war to liberate Jerusalem, he is repeatedly interrupted by cries of “*Deus le volt!*” (“God wills it!”). The bishop of Le Puy is the first to kneel down at the pope’s feet and request permission to answer the call. Hundreds follow suit.
- Eventually, tens of thousands answer the call—perhaps as many as 100,000—mainly from France, Italy, and Germany, but also from Scotland, England, and Denmark. To some extent, the Crusaders—as we call them—acquire a single identity. No longer French or Italian, they become members of an international army driven by a single-minded goal.
- We don’t actually know what Urban says in his speech. We have four different accounts of the speech, and they are all written from memory. Not surprisingly, they are all very different. Only one of the four writers, a Frenchman named Robert the Monk, claims even to have been present. In a way, it really doesn’t matter what he says. What does matter is that his speech galvanizes the audience.



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**Pope Urban II, who was head of the Roman Catholic church from 1088 to 1099 C.E., launched the Crusade movement.**

- Urban doesn’t mince words when he describes how the Muslims are maltreating the Christians and desecrating their shrines in the Holy Land. Events like these can be neither verified nor denied.

- Everyone who hears Urban's speech—one of the most powerful speeches ever delivered—is deeply affected, their emotions blown away by what the Holy Father has said. Pope Urban doesn't deliver just one speech. He travels all over France and Italy, tirelessly promoting his campaign, stirring up the populace, and writing letters to places he cannot visit.
- Of course, other clerics promote the First Crusade from pulpits throughout Christendom. However, recent research reveals that the majority of those who sign up for the First Crusade come from regions that lie in Urban's path, promoting the idea of a holy war designed to recapture Christ's homeland. Were it not for Urban's emotional appeal, it's at least possible that the movement would never have gotten started.
- In the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, famine and plague are widespread, and many people—the poor especially—answer Urban's summons in the belief that a better life awaits them elsewhere. But there is a religious dimension to this as well.
- The pope tells the people that if they take up the cross, Christ will absolve them of all their sins. Most Christians living in this era are haunted by the fear of eternal damnation. The Church promotes fear of divine judgment as a way of strengthening its power over the human imagination. The terrors that await people—if they are packed off to hell—are regularly depicted in grisly detail in sculptures over the west porch, through which one enters a church or cathedral. Answering Urban's appeal, therefore, is a way to banish that fear for good.
- And once the pope is finished, the people loudly shout their assent, and then they try to push their way to the front. People of every station in life sign up for this mighty mission—many of them completely unsuited to military life. Urban has, perhaps inadvertently, let slip the dogs of war. In turn, the Church hurriedly puts in place measures to organize the orderly departure of the many people who sign up.

- Urban probably was not expecting such an enthusiastic response. He's hardly versed in military matters, and there's no indication that he has consulted with any prominent lord or baron to discuss what strategy to employ to achieve the desired goal of liberating the Holy Land from the hands of the Seljuk Turks. In fact, not the least of his dubious accomplishments is his amazing ability to initiate a military expedition without any experience of warfare and to persuade raw recruits that their cause is unassailable.
- The people who sign up have 10 months to settle their affairs—basically, this means handing them over to the Church for safekeeping during their absence. They are required to seek permission from their spiritual advisors. But once they've done this, they can't back out or turn back. If they do, they'll be excommunicated.

### The First Crusade

- The great age of religious pilgrimage began in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and continued until late in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, shortly before Urban's call to arms. Pilgrims believe that by undertaking the journey they will be granted forgiveness for their sins.
- It is a fascinating phenomenon. It involves persons of all social ranks. Some embark on a pilgrimage on their own, while others travel in groups that occasionally number in the thousands. It generally takes a year or more to complete a religious pilgrimage. The holy places in Palestine are the prime destination, although Rome and other sites are also popular. But this military pilgrimage is something else altogether.
- The First Crusade is scheduled to depart on the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin in August 1096. However, the Church is quite unable to control the enthusiasm that Urban has unleashed. Many people leave well ahead of the due date, eager to be the first to arrive and to gain the promised rewards. This includes the bands to which we give the title the Peasants' Crusade, which sets out from the Rhineland in Germany under the leadership of an itinerant monk called Peter the Hermit.

- We are now at one of the great turning points in history. Islam and Christianity are about to embark on a collision course that will bring them to the place they are today. The Christians' journey—about 2,000 miles or more in length—causes terrible sufferings. Thousands die of disease and other catastrophes along the way. It's been suggested that "no more than a third" of those who set out actually reach Jerusalem. And yet the expedition succeeds.
- The Crusading army is anything but saintly, and when it takes Jerusalem, it carries out an indiscriminate massacre of the mixed Muslim and Jewish population. But against all odds, Jerusalem is wrested from Muslim control and falls to the Crusaders. It is one of the most extraordinary campaigns in military history. The fact that the Crusaders are victorious is due largely to their unshakeable faith.
- As a result of the First Crusade, the world will never be the same again. The very foundations of Western culture are remade. The Byzantine Empire is able to breathe again because Crusader states are established in the region, thereby limiting the power of the Seljuks, who have been oppressing it.
- It's important to acknowledge that the Byzantine emperor Alexius could not have envisaged the scale of the migration that would occur as the result of his appeal for help, any more than Urban did. In fact, when Alexius learned of the army that was traveling in the direction of his capital at Constantinople, he was filled with alarm.
- And, of course, the same is true of all of us. We are incapable of knowing the consequences of our actions, or how our lives and the lives of others may be altered in the course of a moment. Still, there is no escaping the fact that individuals matter and that individuals make a difference.
- No individual bears a heavier responsibility for the broad contours of modern history than Pope Urban II. It's true that he had domestic problems—including those posed by a rival claimant to the papal

throne—so much so that it wasn't safe for him to enter Rome. Even so, we cannot assume that he hoped to use the distraction of a foreign war to shore up his position.

- Urban remained tireless right up until his death four years after the speech at Clermont, when his international army—or what remained of it—arrived outside the walls of Jerusalem, in July 1099.

### Suggested Reading

Ashbridge, *The First Crusade*.

Rubinstein, *Armies of Heaven*.

Runciman, *The First Crusade*.

### Questions to Consider

1. To what extent was Pope Urban responsible for the First Crusade, and to what extent was it the consequence of forces beyond his control?
2. To what extent have the events we have considered in this course been determined by contingency?



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Burstein, S. M. *The Reign of Cleopatra*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. Brief account of Cleopatra's life, with a very useful introduction to Ptolemaic Egypt and to Alexandria.

Cameron, A. *Circus Factions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976. Scholarly but packed with fascinating detail.

Champion, J. *Pyrrhus of Epirus*. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword Books, 2009. Brief but stimulating biography, with a detailed treatment of Pyrrhus's battles.

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Crichton, M. *Eaters of the Dead: The Manuscript of Ibn Fadlan, Relating His Experiences with the Northmen in A.D. 922*. New York: HarperCollins, 1976. Fanciful tale that weaves *Beowulf* into Ibn Fadlan's account; the novella on which the movie *The Thirteenth Warrior* is based.

Crossan, D. *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. New York: HarperOne, 2009. Controversial but highly stimulating book that seeks to discover the "historical Jesus" and to strip away what the author believes are later fabrications.

Crowley, R., ed. "The Dark Ages Made Lighter." In *What If? The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1999. Envisages the consequences of a Muslim victory.

Donner, F. M. *Muhammad and the Believers*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2010. Excellent introduction to Islam and Muhammad.

Dvornik, F. *The Slavs: Their Early History and Civilization*. Boston, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1956. A readable general account of the Slavic peoples from their beginnings to the 13<sup>th</sup> century that emphasizes their unity.

Fadlan, I. *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*. Translated by P. Lunde and C. Stone. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 2012. The most readily available translation of Ibn Fadlan's account.

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Fitzgerald, C. P. *The Empress Wu*. London: The Cresset Press, 1986. Somewhat dated, but thorough and balanced.

Fletcher, J. *Cleopatra the Great*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008. Scholarly, well researched, and well written.

Flowers, S. E. *Ibn Fadlan's Travel-Report: As It Concerns the Scandinavian Rûs*. Smithville, Texas: Runa-Raven Press, 1998.

Fox, R. L. *Alexander the Great*. London: Allen Lane, 1973. Highly recommended; readable and authoritative.

Frye, R. N. *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler to the Volga River*. Princeton: Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2005. Translation with valuable commentary.

Gabriel, R. A., and D. W. Boose, Jr. "Kadesh." In *Great Battles of Antiquity*. Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood, 1994. A thorough examination of the battle tactics.

Garouphalias, P. *Pyrrhus: King of Epirus*. London: Stacey International, 1979. Rather too encomiastic but still useful.

Garland, R. S. J. *Celebrity in Antiquity: From Media Tarts to Tabloid Queens*. London: Duckworth & Co., 2006. A light-hearted investigation of an important topic that has strong roots in antiquity.

———. *Hannibal*. Bristol, UK: Bristol Classical Press, 2010. A brief account of a life compounded of unrivaled success and colossal failure.

———. *Julius Caesar*. Bristol, UK: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2003. A brief and affectionate portrait of the great man.

Goldhill, S. *The Oresteia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Useful introduction in barely 100 pages for those coming to the trilogy for the first time.

Goldsworthy, A. *Caesar: Life of a Colossus*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010. An appropriately monumental tribute that is detailed but engaging.

———. *How Rome Fell*. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2009. An excellent narrative of Rome's fall covering the period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

Goodman, M. *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*. London: Allen Lane, 2007. Exploration of Jewish-Roman relations before the outbreak of the Great Jewish Revolt in 66 C.E.

Gordon, S. *When Asia Was the World: Traveling Merchants, Scholars, Warrior, and Monks Who Created the Riches of the East*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008. Eight memoirs of men, including Ibn Fadlan, who traveled to Asia between 500 and 1500 C.E.

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Hanson, V. D. "Poitiers, October 11, 732." In *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Power*. New York: Doubleday, 2011. A stirring account by a major military historian.

Healy, M. *Qadesh 1300 BC: Clash of the Warrior Kings*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 1993. A very well-interested and detailed account; highly recommended.

Heather, P. J. *Goths and Romans 332–489*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. A scholarly account of population movements that transformed the Roman Empire.

Hopkins, K., and M. Beard. *The Colosseum*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005. A brief but highly stimulating account of the building throughout history.

Hoyos, D. *Hannibal: Rome's Greatest Enemy*. Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2008. Shows good insight into its subject's character.

Jeremias, J. *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969. Good introduction to the holy city, focusing on social and economic conditions in the city.

Josephus. *The Jewish War*. Translated by G. A. Williamson. Revised edition by M. Smallwood. Harmondsworth, UK, and New York: Penguin Books, 1981. A fascinating firsthand account by the Jewish insurgent turned supporter of Rome.

Kagan, D. *The Peloponnesian War*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. A rewriting of Thucydides's account of the war with a very useful commentary, filling in the gaps of Thucydides.

Lancel, S. *Hannibal*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999. Seeks to create Hannibal's world and mental worldview.

Martin, T. R., and C. W. Blackwell. *Alexander the Great: The Story of an Ancient Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. An excellent introduction to Alexander, including a chapter on his continuing reputation down to the present day.

Meijer, F. *Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2010. A lively and exciting account.

Nicolle, D. *Poitiers AD 732: Charles Martel Turns the Islamic Tide*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing. An excellent description of the battle and its background, with plentiful maps and illustrations.

O'Connell, R. L. *The Ghosts of Cannae: Hannibal and the Darkest Hour of the Roman Republic*. New York: Random House, 2010. A good basic introduction; "ghosts" refers to the Roman survivors of the battle.

Peddie, J. *Hannibal's War*. Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1977. Especially informative on a variety of logistical details relating to the Second Punic War.

Plato. *The Last Days of Socrates*. Translated by C. Rowe. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 2010. Contains all the dialogues relating to Socrates's trial and death.

Prevas, J. *Envy of the Gods: Alexander the Great's Ill-Fated Journey across Asia*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 2004. An interesting narrative of Alexander's Eastern campaign.

Reat, N. R. *Buddhism: A History*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1994. A good introduction to the growth of Buddhism worldwide.

Roller, D. W. *Cleopatra: A Biography*. A highly readable account that is fully supported by scholarship.

Rothschild, N. H. *Wu Zhao: China's Only Woman Emperor*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc., 2008. A very useful biography aimed at the general reader, with discussion of the role of women in Chinese society.

Rubinstein, J. *Armies of Heaven: The First Crusade and the Quest for Apocalypse*. New York: Basic Books, 2011: Imaginatively addresses the question of what the participants thought about the event.

Runciman, S. *The First Crusade*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. Highly readable and well interested.

Sanders, E. P. *The Historical Figure of Jesus*. London: Penguin Books, 1993. Pays close attention to Jesus's last week.

Secunda, N. *Marathon 490 BC: The First Persian Invasion of Greece*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002. A very well-illustrated and authoritative account.

Stone, I. F. *The Trial of Socrates*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1988. Seeks to demonstrate that there was no basis for the charges brought against Socrates and that the trial was a "tragic crime."

Strong, J. S. *The Legend of King Asoka: A Study and Translation of the Ashokavamsa*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. Although its focus is on Asoka in the Buddhist record, this book also includes important background to his life and times.

Thapar, R. *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961. Though dated, this is still the most detailed account of Asoka's life that is readily available.

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Tyson, J. B. *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986. A scholarly analysis of the accounts of the trial in Luke and Acts.

Volkoff, V. *Vladimir the Russian Viking*. Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1984. A very readable account, with a lot of lively detail; highly recommended, despite being somewhat dated.

Wilson, D. *Charlemagne: The Great Adventure*. London: Hutchinson, 2005. Engagingly written for the nonspecialist.

Wood, M. *In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great*. BBC, 1998. DVD.

Worthington, I. *Philip II of Macedonia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. The best biography to date on a fascinating historical figure.